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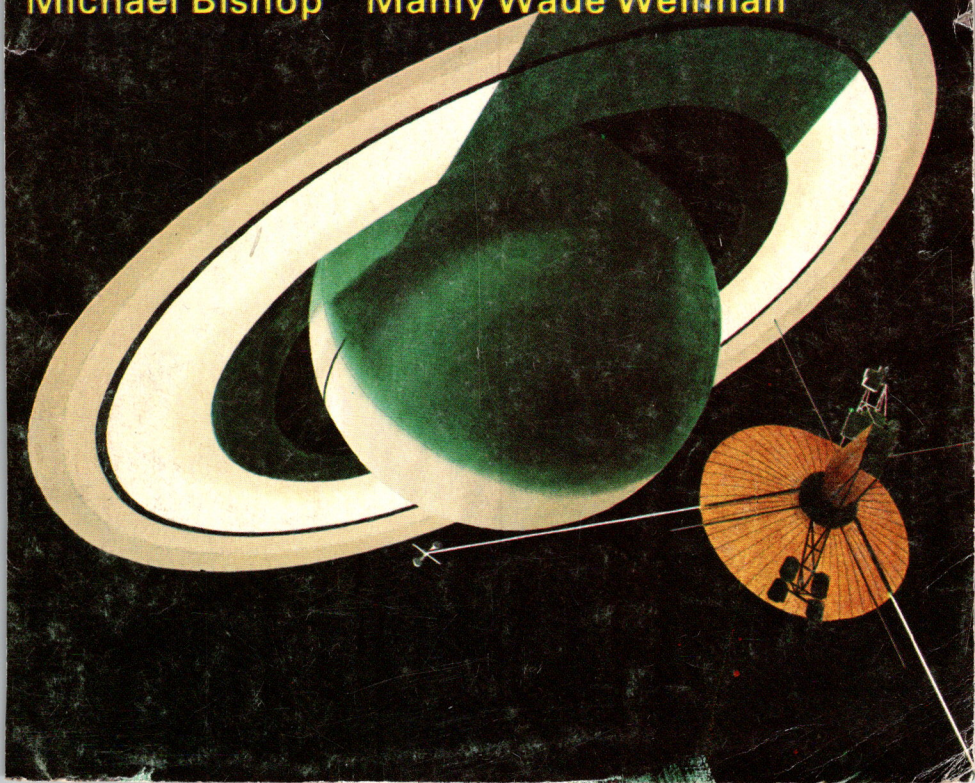

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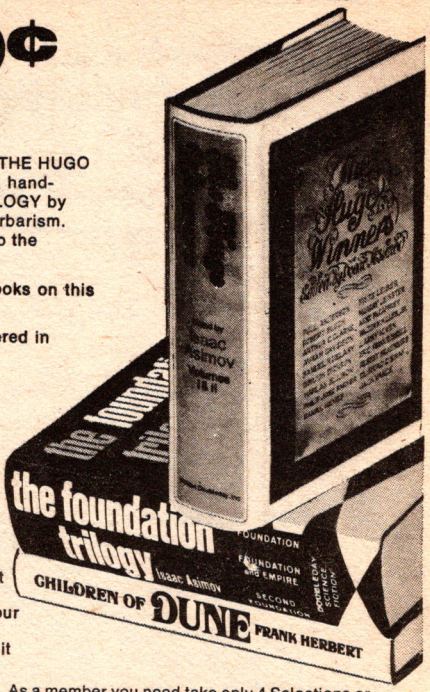

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Prismatica

by SAMUEL R. DELANY

Hommage à James Thurber

Once there was a poor man named Amos. He had nothing but his bright red hair, fast fingers, quick feet, and quicker wits. One grey evening when the rain rumbled in the clouds, about to fall, he came down the cobbled street toward Mariner's Tavern to play jackstraws with Billy Belay, the sailor with a wooden leg and a mouth full of stories that he chewed around and spit out all evening. Billy Belay would talk and drink and laugh, and sometimes sing. Amos would sit quietly and listen — and always win at jackstraws.

But this evening as Amos came into the tavern, Billy was quiet, and so was everyone else. Even Hidalga, the woman who owned the tavern and took no man's jabbering seriously, was leaning her elbows on the counter and listening with opened mouth.

The only man speaking was tall, thin, and grey. He wore a grey cape, grey gloves, grey boots, and his hair was grey. His voice sounded to Amos like wind over mouse fur, or sand ground into old velvet. The only thing about him not grey was a large black trunk beside him, high as his shoulder. Several rough and grimy sailors with cutlasses sat at his table — they were so dirty they were no color at all!

"... and so," the soft grey voice went on, "I need someone clever and brave enough to help my nearest and dearest friend and me. It will be well worth someone's while."

"Who is your friend?" asked Amos. Though he had not heard the beginning of the story, the whole tavern seemed far too quiet for a Saturday night.

The grey man turned and raised

grey eyebrows. "There is my friend, my nearest and dearest." He pointed to the trunk. From it came a low, muggy sound: *Ulmphf.*

All the mouths that were hanging open about the tavern closed.

"What sort of help does he need?" asked Amos. "A doctor?"

The grey eyes widened, and all the mouths opened once more.

"You are talking of my nearest and dearest friend," said the grey voice, softly.

From across the room Billy Belay tried to make a sign for Amos to be quiet, but the grey man turned around, and the finger Billy had put to his lips went quickly into his mouth as if he were picking his teeth.

"Friendship is a rare thing these days," said Amos. "What sort of help do you and your friend need?"

"The question is: would you be willing to give it?" said the grey man.

"And the answer is: if it is worth my while," said Amos, who really could think very quickly.

"Would it be worth all the pearls you could put in your pockets, all the gold you could carry in one hand, all the diamonds you could lift in the other, and all the emeralds you could haul up from a well in a brass kettle?"

"That is not much for true friendship," said Amos.

"If you saw a man living through the happiest moment of his life, would it be worth it then?"

"Perhaps it would," Amos admitted.

"Then you'll help my friend and me?"

"For all the pearls I can put in my pockets, all the gold I can carry in one hand, all the diamonds I can lift in the other, all the emeralds I can haul up from a well in a brass kettle, and a chance to see a man living through the happiest moment of his life — I'll help you!"

Billy Belay put his head down on the table and began to cry. Hidalga buried her face in her hands, and everyone else in the tavern turned away and began to look rather grey themselves.

"Then come with me," said the grey man, and the rough sailors with cutlasses rose about him and hoisted the trunk to their grimy shoulders — *Onvbpmf,* came the thick sound from the trunk — and the grey man flung out his cape, grabbed Amos by the hand, and ran out into the street.

In the sky the clouds swirled and bumped each other, trying to upset the rain.

Halfway down the cobbled street the grey man cried, "Halt!"

Everyone halted and put the trunk down on the sidewalk.

The grey man went over and picked up a tangerine-colored alley

cat that had been searching for fish heads in the garbage pail. "Open the trunk," he said. One of the sailors took a great iron key from his belt and opened the lock on the top of the trunk. The grey man took out his thin sword of grey steel and pried up the lid ever so slightly. Then he tossed the cat inside.

Immediately he let the lid drop again, and the sailor with the iron key locked the lock on the top of the box. From inside came the mew of a cat that ended with a deep, depressing: *Elmblmpf.*

"I think," said Amos, who thought quickly and was quick to tell what he thought, "that everything is not quite right in there."

"Be quiet and help me," said the thin grey man, "or I shall put *you* in the trunk with my nearest and dearest."

For a moment, Amos was just a little afraid.

II

Then they were on a ship, and all the boards were grey from having gone so long without paint. The grey man took Amos into his cabin and they sat down on opposite sides of a table.

"Now," said the grey man, "here is a map."

"Where did you get it?" asked Amos.

"I stole it from my worse and worst enemy."

"What is it a map of?" Amos asked. He knew you should ask as many questions as possible when there were so many things you didn't know.

"It is a map of many places and many treasures, and I need someone to help me find them."

"Are these treasures the pearls and gold and diamonds and emeralds you told me about?"

"Nonsense," said the grey man. "I have more emeralds and diamonds and gold and pearls than I know what to do with," and he opened a closet door.

Amos stood blinking as jewels by the thousands fell out on the floor, glittering and gleaming, red, green, and yellow.

"Help me push them back in the closet," said the grey man. "They're so bright that if I look at them too long, I get a headache."

So they pushed the jewels back and leaned against the closet door till it closed. Then they returned to the map.

"Then what *are* the treasures?" Amos asked, full of curiosity.

"The treasure is happiness, for me and my nearest and dearest friend."

"How do you intend to find it?"

"In a mirror," said the grey man. "In three mirrors, or rather, one mirror broken in three pieces."

"A broken mirror is bad luck," said Amos. "Who broke it?"

"A wizard so great and old and so terrible that you and I need never worry about him."

"Does this map tell where the pieces are hidden?"

"Exactly," said the grey man. "Look, we are here."

"How can you tell?"

"The map says so," said the grey man. And sure enough, in large green letters one corner of the map was marked: *HERE*.

"Perhaps somewhere nearer than you think, up this one, and two leagues short of over there, the pieces are hidden."

"Your greatest happiness will be to look into this mirror?"

"It will be the greatest happiness of myself and of my nearest and dearest friend."

"Very well," said Amos. "When do we start?"

"When the dawn is foggy and the sun is hidden and the air is grey as grey can be."

"Very well," said Amos a second time. "Until then, I shall walk around and explore your ship."

"It will be tomorrow at four o'clock in the morning," said the grey man. "So don't stay up too late."

"Very well," said Amos a third time.

As Amos was about to leave, the grey man picked up a brilliant red ruby that had fallen from the closet and not been put back. On the side of the trunk that now sat in the corner was a small triangular door that Amos had not seen. The grey man pulled it open, tossed in the ruby, and slammed it quickly: *Orghmflbfe*.

III

Outside, the clouds hung so low the top of the ship's tallest mast threatened to prick one open. The wind tossed about in Amos' red hair and scurried in and out of his rags. Sitting on the railing of the ship was a sailor splicing a rope.

"Good evening," said Amos. "I'm exploring the ship and I have very little time. I have to be up at four o'clock in the morning. So can you tell me what I must be sure to avoid because it would be so silly and uninteresting that I would learn nothing from it?"

The sailor frowned a little while, then said, "There is nothing at all interesting in the ship's brig."

"Thank you very much," said Amos and walked on till he came to another sailor whose feet were awash in soap suds. The sailor was pushing a mop back and forth so hard that Amos decided he was trying to scrub the last bit of color off the grey boards. "Good evening to you too," said Amos. "I'm exploring the ship and I have very little time since I'm to be up at four o'clock in the morning. I was told to avoid the brig. So could you

point it out to me? I don't want to wander into it by accident."

The sailor leaned his chin on his mop handle awhile, then said, "If you want to avoid it, don't go down the second hatchway behind the wheel house."

"Thank you very much," said Amos and hurried off to the wheel house. When he found the second hatchway, he went down very quickly and was just about to go to the barred cell when he saw the grimy sailor with the great iron key — who must be the jailor as well, thought Amos.

"Good evening," Amos said. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, and how is yourself, and what are you doing down here?"

"I'm standing here, trying to be friendly," said Amos. "I was told there was nothing of interest down here. And since it is so dull, I thought I would keep you company."

The sailor fingered his key awhile, then said, "That is kind of you, I suppose."

"Yes, it is," said Amos. "What do they keep here that is so uninteresting everyone tells me to avoid it."

"This is the ship's brig and we keep prisoners here. What else should we keep?"

"That's a good question," said Amos. "What *do* you keep?"

The jailor fingered his key again, then said, "Nothing of interest at all."

Just then, behind the bars, Amos saw the pile of grubby grey blankets move. A corner fell away and he saw just the edge of something as red as his own bright hair.

"I suppose, then," said Amos, "I've done well to avoid coming here." And he turned around and left.

But that night, as the rain poured over the deck, and the drum-drum-drumming of heavy drops lulled everyone on the ship to sleep, Amos hurried over the slippery boards under the dripping eaves of the wheel house to the second hatchway, and went down. The lamps were low, the jailor was huddled asleep in a corner on a piece of grey canvas, but Amos went immediately to the bars and looked through.

More blankets had fallen away, and besides a red as bright as his own hair, he could see a green the color of parrot's feathers, a yellow as pale as Chinese mustard, and a blue brilliant as the sky at eight o'clock in July. Have you ever watched someone asleep under a pile of blankets? You can see the blankets move up and down, up and down with breathing. That's how Amos knew this was a person. "Psssst," he said. "You

colorful but uninteresting person, wake up and talk to me."

Then all the blankets fell away, and a man with more colors on him than Amos had ever seen sat up rubbing his eyes. His sleeves were green silk with blue and purple trimming. His cape was crimson with orange design. His shirt was gold with rainbow checks, and one boot was white and the other was black.

"Who are you?" asked the parti-colored prisoner.

"I am Amos, and I am here to see what makes you so uninteresting that everyone tells me to avoid you and covers you up with blankets."

"I am Jack, the Prince of the Far Rainbow, and I am a prisoner here."

"Neither one of those facts is so incredible compared to some of the strange things in this world," said Amos. "Why are you the Prince of the Far Rainbow, and why are you a prisoner?"

"Ah," said Jack, "the second question is easy to answer, but the first is not so simple. I am a prisoner here because a skinny grey man stole a map from me and put me in the brig so I could not get it back from him. But why am I the Prince of the Far Rainbow? That is exactly the question asked me a year ago today by a wizard so great and so old and so terrible that you and I need never worry about him. I answered him, 'I am Prince because my father is King, and everyone knows I should be.' Then the wizard asked me, 'Why should you be Prince and not one of a dozen others? Are you fit to rule, can you judge fairly, can you resist temptation?' I had no idea what he meant, and again I answered, 'I am Prince because my father is King.' The wizard took a mirror and held it before me. 'What do you see?' he asked. 'I see myself, just as I should, the Prince of the Far Rainbow,' said I. Then the wizard grew furious and struck the mirror into three pieces and cried, 'Not until you look into this mirror whole again will you be Prince of the Far Rainbow, for a woman worthy of a prince is trapped behind the glass, and not till she is free can you rule in your own land.' There was an explosion, and when I woke up, I was without my crown, lying dressed as you see me now in a green meadow. In my pocket was a map that told me where all the pieces were hidden. Only it did not show me how to get back to the Far Rainbow. And still I do not know how to get home."

"I see, I see," said Amos. "How did the skinny grey man steal it from you, and what does he want with it?"

"Well," said Jack, "after I could not find my way home, I

decided I should try and find the pieces. So I began to search. The first person I met was the thin grey man, and with him was his large black trunk in which, he said, was his nearest and dearest friend. He said if I would work for him and carry his trunk, he would pay me a great deal of money with which I could buy a ship and continue my search. He told me that he himself would very much like to see a woman worthy of a prince. 'Especially,' he said, 'such a colorful prince as you.' I carried his trunk for many months, and at last he paid me a great deal of money with which I bought a ship. But then the skinny grey man stole my map, stole my ship, and put me here in the brig, and told me that he and his nearest and dearest friend would find the mirror all for themselves."

"What could he want with a woman worthy of a prince?" asked Amos.

"I don't even like to think about it," said Jack. "Once he asked me to unzip the leather flap at the end of the trunk and stick my head in to see how his nearest and dearest friend was getting along. But I would not because I had seen him catch a beautiful blue bird with red feathers round its neck and stick it through the same zipper, and all there was was an uncomfortable sound from the trunk, something like: *Orulmhf.*"

"Oh, yes," said Amos. "I know the sound. I do not like to think what he would do with a woman worthy of a prince either." Yet Amos found himself thinking of it anyway. "His lack of friendship for you certainly doesn't speak well of his friendship for his nearest and dearest."

Jack nodded.

"Why doesn't he get the mirror himself, instead of asking me?" Amos wanted to know.

"Did you look at where the pieces were hidden?" asked Jack.

"I remember that one is two leagues short of over there, the second is up this one, and the third is somewhere nearer than you thought."

"That's right," said Jack. "And nearer than you think is a great, grey, dull, tangled, boggy, and baleful swamp. The first piece is at the bottom of a luminous pool in the center. But it is so grey there that the grey man would blend completely in with the scenery and never get out again. Up this one is a mountain so high that the North Wind lives in a cave there. The second piece of the mirror is on the highest peak of that mountain. It is so windy there, and the grey man is so thin, he would be blown away before he was halfway to the top. Two leagues short of over there, where the third piece is, there

stretches a garden of violent colors and rich perfume where black butterflies glisten on the rims of pink marble fountains, and bright vines weave in and about. The only thing white in the garden is a silver-white unicorn who guards the last piece of the mirror. Perhaps the grey man could get that piece himself, but he will not want to, I know, for lots of bright colors give him a headache."

"Then it says something for his endurance that he was able to put up with your glittering clothes for so long," said Amos. "Anyway, I don't think it's fair of our grey friend to get your mirror with your map. You should at least have a chance at it. Let me see, the first place we are going is somewhere nearer than you think."

"In the swamp then,' said Jack.

"Would you like to come with me?" asked Amos, "and get the piece yourself."

"Of course," said Jack. "But how?"

"I have a plan," said Amos, who could think very quickly when he had to. "Simply do as I say." Amos began to whisper through the bars. Behind them the jailor snored on his piece of canvas.

IV

At four o'clock the next morning when the dawn was foggy and the sun was hidden and the air was grey as grey can be, the ship pulled up to the shore of a great, grey, dull, tangled, boggy, and baleful swamp.

"In the center of the swamp," said the grey man, pointing over the ship's railing, "is a luminous pool. At the bottom of the pool is a piece of mirror. Can you be back by lunch?"

"I think so," said Amos. "But that *is* a terribly grey swamp. I might blend into the scenery so completely I might never get out of it again."

"With your red hair?" asked the grey man.

"My red hair," said Amos, "is only on the top of my head. My clothes are ragged and dirty and will probably turn grey in no time with all that mist. Are there any bright-colored clothes on the ship, glittering with gold and gleaming with silk?"

"There is my closet full of jewels," said the grey man. "Wear as many as you want."

"They would weigh me down," said Amos, "and I could not be back for lunch. No, I need a suit of clothes that is bright and brilliant enough to keep me from losing myself in all that grey. For if I *do* lose myself, *you* will never have your mirror."

So the grey man turned to one of his sailors and said, "You know where you can get him such a suit."

As the man started to go, Amos said, "It seems a shame to take someone's clothes away, especially since I might not come back anyway. Give my rags to whoever owns this suit to keep for me until I come back." Amos jumped out of his rags and handed them to the sailor who trotted off toward the wheel house. Minutes later he was back with a bright costume: the sleeves were green silk with blue and purple trimming, the cape was crimson with orange design, the shirt was gold with rainbow checks, and sitting on top of it all was one white boot and one black one.

"These are what I need," said Amos, putting on the clothes quickly, for he was beginning to get chilly standing in his underwear. Then he climbed over the edge of the boat into the swamp. He was so bright and colorful that nobody saw the figure in dirty rags run quickly behind them to the far end of the ship and also climb over into the swamp. Had the figure been Amos — it was wearing Amos' rags — the red hair might have attracted some attention, but Jack's hair, for all his colorful costume, was a very ordinary brown.

The grey man looked after Amos until he disappeared. Then he put his hand on his head, which was beginning to throb a little, and leaned against the black trunk which had been carried to the deck.

Glumphvmr, came from the trunk.

"Oh, my nearest and dearest friend," said the grey man, "I had almost forgotten you. Forgive me." He took from his pocket an envelope, and from the envelope he took a large, fluttering moth. "This flew in my window last night," he said. The wings were pale blue, with brown bands on the edges, and the undersides were flecked with spots of gold. He pushed in a long metal flap at the side of the trunk, very like a mail slot, and slid the moth inside.

Fuffle, came from the trunk, and the grey man smiled.

In the swamp, Amos waited until the prince had found him. "Did you have any trouble?" Amos asked.

"Not at all," laughed Jack. "They didn't even notice that the jailor was gone." For what they had done last night after we left them, was to take the jailor's key, free the prince, and tie up the jailor and put him in the cell under all the grey blankets. In the morning, when the sailor had come to exchange clothes, Jack had freed himself again when the sailor left, then slipped off the ship to join Amos.

"Now let us find your luminous pool," said Amos, "so we can be back by lunch."

Together they started through

the marsh and muck. "You know," said Amos, stopping once to look at a grey spider web that spread from the limb of a tree above them to a vine creeping on the ground, "this place isn't so grey after all. Look closely."

And in each drop of water on each strand of the web, the light was broken up as if through a tiny prism into blues and yellows and reds. As they looked, Jack sighed. "These are the colors of the Far Rainbow," he said.

He said no more, but Amos felt very sorry for him. They went quickly now toward the center of the swamp. "No, it isn't completely grey," said Jack. On a stump beside them a green-grey lizard blinked a red eye at them, a golden hornet buzzed above their heads, and a snake that was grey on top rolled out of their way and showed an orange belly.

"And look at that!" cried Amos.

Ahead through the tall grey tree trunks, silvery light rose in the mist.

"The luminous pool!" cried the prince, and they ran forward.

Sure enough they found themselves on the edge of a round, silvery pool. Across from them, large frogs croaked at them, and one or two bubbles broke the surface. Together Amos and Jack looked into the water.

Perhaps they expected to see the mirror glittering in the weeds and pebbles at the bottom of the pool; perhaps they expected their own reflections. But they saw neither. Instead, the face of a beautiful girl looked up at them from below the surface.

Jack and Amos frowned. The girl laughed, and the water bubbled.

"Who are you?" asked Amos.

And in return from the bubbles they heard, "Who are you?"

"I am Jack, Prince of the Far Rainbow," said Jack, "and this is Amos."

"I am a woman worthy of a prince," said the face in the water, "and my name is Lea."

Now Amos asked, "Why are you worthy of a prince? And how did you get where you are?"

"Ah," said Lea, "the second question is easy to answer, but the first is not so simple. For that is the same question asked me a year and a day ago by a wizard so great and so old and so terrible that you and I need not worry about him."

"What did you say to him?" asked Jack.

"I told him I could speak all the languages of men, that I was brave and strong and beautiful, and could govern beside any man. He said I was proud, and that my pride was good. But then he saw how I looked in mirrors at my own face, and he said that I was vain, and my

vanity was bad, and that it would keep me apart from the prince I was worthy of. The shiny surface of all things, he told me, will keep us apart, until a prince can gather the pieces of the mirror together again, which will release me."

"Then I am the prince to save you," said Jack.

"Are you indeed?" asked Lea, smiling. "A piece of the mirror I am trapped in lies at the bottom of this pool. Once I myself dived from a rock into the blue ocean to retrieve the pearl of white fire I wear on my forehead now. That was the deepest dive ever heard of by man or woman, and this pool is ten feet deeper than that. Will you still try?"

"I will try and perhaps die trying," said Jack, "but I can do no more and no less." Then Jack filled his lungs and dove headlong into the pool.

Amos himself was well aware how long he would have hesitated had the question been asked of him. As the seconds passed, he began to fear for Jack's life, and wished he had had a chance to figure some other way to get the mirror out. One minute passed; perhaps they could have tricked the girl into bringing it up herself. Two minutes; they could have tied a string to the leg of a frog and sent him down to do the searching. Three minutes; there was not a bubble on the water, and Amos surprised himself by deciding the only thing to do was to jump in and at least try to save the prince. But there was a splash of water at his feet!

Jack's head emerged, and a moment later his hand holding the large fragment of a broken mirror came into sight.

Amos was so delighted he jumped up and down. The prince swam to shore, and Amos helped him out. Then they leaned the mirror against a tree and rested for a while. "It's well I wore these rags of yours," said Jack, "and not my own clothes, for the weeds would have caught in my cloak and the boots would have pulled me down and I would have never come up. Thank you, Amos."

"It's a very little thing to thank me for," Amos said. "But we had better start back if we want to be at the ship in time for lunch."

So they started back and by noon had nearly reached the ship. Then the prince left the mirror with Amos and darted on ahead to get back to the cell. Then Amos walked out to the boat with the broken glass.

"Well," he called up to the thin grey man who sat on the top of the trunk, waiting, "here is your mirror from the bottom of the luminous pool."

The grey man was so happy he

jumped from the trunk, turned a cartwheel, then fell to wheezing and coughing and had to be slapped on the back several times.

"Good for you," he said when Amos had climbed onto the deck and given him the glass. "Now come have lunch with me, but for heaven's sake get out of that circus tent before I get another headache."

So Amos took off the prince's clothes and the sailor took them to the brig and returned with Amos' rags. When he had dressed and was about to go with the grey man to lunch, his sleeve brushed the grey man's arm. The grey man stopped and frowned so deeply he face became almost black. "These clothes are wet and the ones you wore were dry."

"So they are," said Amos. "What do you make of that?"

The grey man scowled and contemplated and cogitated, but could not make anything of it. At last he said, "Never mind. Come to lunch."

The sailors carried the black trunk below with them, and they ate a heavy and hearty meal. The grey man speared all the radishes from the salad on his knife and flipped them into a funnel he had stuck in a round opening in the trunk: *Fulrmp, Melrulf, Ulfmphgrumf!*

V

"When do I go after the next piece?" Amos asked when they had finished eating.

"Tomorrow evening when the sunset is golden and the sky is turquoise and the rocks are stained red in the setting sun," said the grey man. "I shall watch the whole proceedings with sun glasses."

"I think that's a good idea," said Amos. "You won't get such a bad headache."

That night Amos again went to the brig. No one had missed the jailor yet. So there was no guard at all.

"How is our friend doing?" Amos asked the prince, pointing to the bundle of blankets in the corner.

"Well enough," said Jack. "I gave him food and water when they brought me some. I think he's asleep now."

"Good," said Amos. "So one third of your magic mirror has been found. Tomorrow evening I go off for the second piece. Would you like to come with me?"

"I certainly would," said Jack. "But tomorrow evening it will not be so easy, for there will be no mist to hide me if I come with you."

"Then we'll work it so you won't have to hide," said Amos. "If I remember you right, the second piece is on the top of a windy

mountain so high the North Wind lives in a cave there."

"That's right," said Jack.

"Very well then, I have a plan." Again Amos began to whisper through the bars, and Jack smiled and nodded.

They sailed all that night and all the next day, and toward evening they pulled in to a rocky shore where just a few hundred yards away a mountain rose high and higher into the clear twilight.

The sailors gathered on the deck of the ship just as the sun began to set, and the grey man put one grey gloved hand on Amos' shoulder and pointed to the mountain with his other. "There, among the windy peaks, is the cave of the North Wind. Even higher, on the highest and windiest peak, is the second fragment of the mirror. It is a long, dangerous, and treacherous climb. Shall I expect you back for breakfast?"

"Certainly," said Amos. "Fried eggs, if you please, once over lightly, and plenty of hot sausages."

"I will tell the cook," said the grey man.

"Good," said Amos. "Oh, but one more thing. You say it is windy there. I shall need a good supply of rope, then, and perhaps you can spare a man to go with me. A rope is not much good if there is a person only on one end. If I have someone with me, I can hold him if he blows off and he can do the same for me." Amos turned to the sailors. "What about that man there? He has a rope and is well muffled against the wind."

"Take whom you like," said the grey man, "so long as you bring back my mirror." The well-muffled sailor with the coil of rope on his shoulder stepped forward with Amos.

Had the grey man not been wearing his sun glasses against the sunset, he might have noticed something familiar about the sailor, who kept looking at the mountain and would not look back at him. But as it was, he suspected nothing.

Amos and the well-muffled sailor clumbed down onto the rocks that the sun had stained red, and started toward the slope of the mountain. Once the grey man raised his glasses as he watched them go but lowered them quickly, for it was the most golden hour of the sunset then. The sun sank, and he could not see them anymore. Even so, he stood at the rail a long time till a sound in the darkness roused him from his reverie: *Blmvghm!*

Amos and Jack climbed long and hard through the evening. When darkness fell, at first they thought they would have to stop,

but the clear stars made a mist over the jagged rocks, and a little later the moon rose. After that it was much easier going. Shortly the wind began. First a breeze merely tugged at their collars. Then rougher gusts began to nip their fingers. At last buffets of wind flattened them against the rock one moment, then tried to jerk them loose the next. The rope was very useful indeed, and neither one complained. They simply went on climbing, steadily through the hours. Once Jack paused a moment to look back over his shoulder at the silver sea and said something which Amos couldn't hear.

"What did you say?" cried Amos above the howl.

"I said," the prince cried back, "look at the moon!"

Now Amos looked over his shoulder too and saw that the white disk was going slowly down.

They began again, climbing faster than ever, but in another hour the bottom of the moon had already sunk below the edge of the ocean. At last they gained a fair-sized ledge where the wind was not so strong. Above, there seemed no way to go any higher.

Jack gazed out at the moon and sighed. "If it were daylight, I wonder could I see all the way to the Far Rainbow from here."

"You might," said Amos. But though his heart was with Jack, he still felt a good spirit was important to keep up. "But we might see it a lot more clearly from the top of this mountain." But as he said it, the last light of the moon winked out. Now even the stars were gone, and the blackness about them was complete. But as they turned to seek shelter in the rising wind, Amos cried, "There's a light!"

"Where's a light?" cried Jack.

"Glowing behind those rocks," cried Amos.

A faint orange glow outlined the top of a craggy boulder, and they hurried toward it over the crumbly ledge. When they climbed the rock, they saw that the light came from behind another wall of stone further away, and they scrambled toward it, pebbles and bits of ice rolling under their hands. Behind the wall they saw that the light was even stronger above another ridge, and they did their best to climb it without falling who-knows-how-many hundreds of feet to the foot of the mountain. At last they pulled themselves onto the ledge and leaned against the side, panting. Far ahead of them, orange flames flickered brightly and there was light on each face. For all the cold wind their faces were still shiny with the sweat of the effort.

"Come on," said Amos, "just a little way ...."

And from half a dozen directions they heard: *Come on, just a*

little way ... just a little way ... little way ...

They stared at each other and Jack jumped up. "Why we must be in the cave of ...."

And echoing back they heard: *... must be in the cave of ... in the cave of ... cave of ...*

"... the North Wind," whispered Amos.

They started forward again toward the fires. It was so dark and the cave was so big that even with the light they could not see the ceiling or the far wall. The fires themselves burned in huge scooped out basins of stone. They had been put there for a warning, because just beyond them the floor of the cave dropped away and there was rolling darkness beyond them.

"I wonder if he's at home," whispered Jack.

Then before them was a rushing and a rumbling and a rolling like thunder, and from the blackness a voice said, "I am the North Wind, and I am very much at home."

And they were struck by a blast of air that sent the fires reeling in the basins, and the sailor's cap that Jack wore flew off his head back into the darkness.

"Are you really the North Wind?" Amos asked.

"Yes, I am really the North Wind," came the thunderous voice. "Now you tell me who you are before I blow you into little pieces and scatter them over the whole wide world."

"I am Amos and this is Jack, Prince of the Far Rainbow," said Amos. "And we wandered into your cave by accident and meant nothing impolite. But the moon went down, so we had to stop climbing, and we saw your light."

"Where were you climbing to?"

Now Jack said, "To the top of the mountain where there is a piece of a mirror."

"Yes," said the North Wind, "there is a mirror there. A wizard so great and so old and so terrible that neither you nor I need worry about him placed it there a year and two days ago. I blew him there myself in return for a favor he did me a million years past, for it was he who made this cave for me by artful and devious magic."

"We have come to take the mirror back," said Jack.

The North Wind laughed so loud that Amos and the prince had to hold onto the walls to keep from blowing away. "It is so high and so cold up there that you will never reach it," said the Wind. "Even the wizard had to ask my help to put it there."

"Then," called Amos, "you could help us get there too?"

The North Wind was silent a whole minute. Then he asked, "Why should I? The wizard built my cave for me. What have you

done to deserve such help?"

"Nothing yet," said Amos. "But we can help you if you help us."

"How can you help me?" asked the Wind.

"Well," said Amos, "like this. You say you are really the North Wind. How can you prove it?"

"How can you prove you are really you?" returned the Wind.

"Easily," said Amos. "I have red hair, I have freckles, I am five feet, seven inches tall, and I have brown eyes. All you need do is go to Hidalga who owns the Mariner's Tavern and ask her who has red hair, is so tall, with such eyes, and she will tell you, 'It is her own darling Amos.' And Hidalga's word should be proof enough for anybody. Now what do you look like?"

"What do I look like?" demanded the North Wind.

"Yes, describe yourself to me."

"I'm big and I'm cold and I'm blustery ...."

"That's what you feel like," said Amos. "Not what you look like. I want to know how I would recognize you if I saw you walking quietly down the street toward me when you were off duty."

"I'm freezing and I'm icy and I'm chilling ...."

"Again, that's not what you look like; it's what you feel like."

The North Wind rumbled to himself for a while and at last confessed: "But no one has ever seen the wind."

"So I had heard," said Amos. "But haven't you ever looked into a mirror?"

"Alas," sighed the North Wind, "mirrors are always kept inside people's houses where I am never invited. So I never had a chance to look in one. Besides, I have been too busy."

"Well," said Amos, "if you help get us to the top of the mountain, we will let you look into the fragment of the mirror." Then he added, "which is more than your friend the wizard did, apparently." Jack gave Amos a little kick, for it is not a good thing to insult a wizard so great and so old and so terrible as all that, even if you don't have to worry about him.

The North Wind mumbled and groaned around the darkness for a while and at last said, "Very well. Climb on my shoulders and I shall carry you up to the highest peak of this mountain. When I have looked into your mirror, I will carry you down again to where you may descend the rest of the way by yourselves."

Amos and Jack were happy as they had ever been, and the North Wind roared to the edge of the ledge and they climbed on his back, one on each shoulder. They held themselves tight by his long, thick hair, and the Wind's great wings filled the cave with such a roaring

that the fires, had they not been maintained by magic, would have been blown out. The sound of the great wing feathers clashing against one another was like steel against bronze.

The North Wind rose up in his cave and sped toward the opening that was so high they could not see the top and so wide they could not see the far wall, and his hair brushed the ceiling, and his toenails scraped the floor, and the tips of his wings sent boulders crashing from either side as he leapt into the black.

They circled so high they cleared the clouds, and once again the stars were like diamonds dusting the velvet night. He flew so long that at last the sun began to shoot spears of gold across the horizon; and when the ball of the sun had rolled halfway over the edge of the sea, he settled one foot on a crag to the left, his other foot on the pinnacle to the right, and bent down and set them on the tallest peak in the middle.

"Now where is the mirror?" asked Amos, looking around.

The dawning sun splashed the snow and ice with silver.

"When I blew the wizard here a year ago," said North Wind from above them, "he left it right there, but the snow and ice have frozen over it."

Amos and the prince began to brush the snow from a lump on the ground, and beneath the white covering was pure and glittering ice. It was a very large lump, nearly as large as the black trunk of the skinny grey man.

"It must be in the center of this chunk of ice," said Jack. As they stared at the shiny, frozen hunk, something moved inside it, and they saw it was the form of a lovely girl. It was Lea, who had appeared to them in the pool.

She smiled at them and said, "I am glad you have come for the second piece of the mirror, but it is buried in this frozen shard of ice. Once, when I was a girl, I chopped through a chunk of ice to get to an earring my mother had dropped the night before in a winter dance. That block of ice was the coldest and hardest ice any man or woman had ever seen. This block is ten degrees colder. Can you chop through it?"

"I can try," said Jack, "or perhaps die trying. But I can do no more and no less." And he took the small pickax they had used to help them climb the mountain.

"Will you be finished before breakfast time?" asked Amos, glancing at the sun.

"Of course before breakfast," said the prince, and fell to chopping. The ice chips flew around him, and he worked up such a sweat that in all the cold he still had

to take off his shirt. He worked so hard that in one hour he had laid open the chunk, and there, sticking out, was the broken fragment of mirror. Tired but smiling, the prince lifted it from the ice and handed it to Amos. Then he went to pick up his shirt and coat.

"All right, North Wind," cried Amos. "Take a look at yourself."

"Stand so that the sun is in your eyes," said the North Wind, towering over Amos, "because I do not want anyone else to see before I have."

So Amos and Jack stood with the sun in their eyes, and the great blustering North Wind squatted down to look at himself in the mirror. He must have been pleased with what he saw, because he gave a long loud laugh that nearly blew them from the peak. Then he leapt a mile into the air, turned over three times, then swooped down upon them, grabbing them up and setting them on his shoulders. Amos and Jack clung to his long, thick hair as the Wind began to fly down the mountain, crying out in a windy voice: "Now I shall tell all the leaves and whisper to the waves who I am and what I look like, so they can chatter about it among themselves in autumn and rise and doff their caps to me before a winter storm." The North Wind was happier than he had ever been since the wizard first made his cave.

It gets light on the top of a mountain well before it does at the foot, and this mountain was so high that when they reached the bottom the sun was nowhere in sight, and they had a good half hour until breakfast time.

"You run and get back in your cell," said Amos, "and when I have given you enough time, I shall return and eat my eggs and sausages."

So the prince ran down the rocks to the shore and snuck onto the ship, and Amos waited for the sun to come up. When it did, he started back.

VI

But, at the boat, all had not gone according to Amos' plan during the night. The grey man, still puzzling over Amos' wet clothes, — and at last be began to inquire whom Amos had solicited from the sailors to go with him — had gone to the brig himself.

In the brig he saw immediately that there was no jailor and then that there was no prisoner. Furious, he rushed into the cell and began to tear apart the bundle of blankets in the corner. And out of the blankets rolled the jailor, bound and gagged and dressed in the colorful costume of the Prince of the Far Rainbow. For it was the jailor's clothes that Jack had worn when he had gone with Amos to the mountain.

When the gag came off, the story came out, and the part of the story the jailor had slept through the grey man could guess for himself. So he untied the jailor and called the sailors and made plans for Amos's and the prince's return. The last thing the grey man did was take the beautiful costume back to his cabin where the black trunk was waiting.

When Amos came up to the ship with the mirror under his arm, he called, "Here's your mirror. Where are my eggs and sausages?"

"Sizzling hot and waiting," said the grey man, lifting his sunglasses. "Where is the sailor you took to help you?"

"Alas," said Amos, "he was blown away in the wind." He climbed up the ladder and handed the grey man the mirror. "Now we only have a third to go, if I remember right. When do I start looking for that?"

"This afternoon when the sun is its highest and hottest," said the grey man.

"Don't I get a chance to rest?" asked Amos. "I have been climbing up and down mountains all night."

"You may take a nap," said the grey man. "But come and have breakfast first." The grey man put his arm around Amos' shoulder and took him down to his cabin where the cook brought them a big, steaming platter of sausages and eggs.

"You have done very well," said the grey man pointing to the wall where he had hung the first two pieces of the mirror together. Now they could make out what the shape of the third would be. "And if you get the last one, you will have done very well indeed."

"I can almost feel the weight of those diamonds and emeralds and gold and pearls right now," said Amos.

"Can you really?" asked the grey man. He pulled a piece of green silk from his pocket, went to the black box, and stuffed it into a small square door: *Orlmnb!*

"Where is the third mirror hidden?" asked Amos.

"Two leagues short of over there is a garden of violent colors and rich perfume, where black butterflies glisten on the rims of pink marble fountains, and the only thing white in it is a silver-white unicorn who guards the third piece of the mirror."

"Then it's good I am going to get it for you," said Amos, "because even with your sun glasses, it would give you a terrible headache."

"Curses," said the grey man, "but you're right." He took from his pocket a strip of crimson cloth with orange design, went to the truck and lowered it through a

small round hole in the top. As the last of it dropped from sight, the thing in the box went: *Mlpbgrm*!

"I am very anxious to see you at the happiest moment of your life," said Amos. "But you still haven't told me what you and your nearest and dearest friend expect to find in the mirror."

"Haven't I?" said the grey man. He reached under the table and took out a white leather boot, went to the trunk, lifted the lid, and tossed it in.

Org! This sound was not from the trunk; it was Amos swallowing his last piece of sausage much too fast. He and the grey man looked at one another, and neither said anything. The only sound was from the trunk: *Grublmeumplefrmp ... hic!*

"Well," said Amos at last, "I think I'll go outside and walk around the deck a bit."

"Nonsense," said the grey man smoothing his grey gloves over his wrists. "If you're going to be up this afternoon, you'd better go to sleep right now."

"Believe me, a little air would make me sleep much better."

"Believe *me*," said the grey man, "I have put a little something in your eggs and sausages that will make you sleep much better than all the air in the world."

Suddenly Amos felt his eyes grow heavy, his head grow light, and he slipped down in his chair.

When Amos woke up, he was lying on the floor of the ship's brig inside the cell, and Jack, in his underwear — for the sailors had jumped on him when he came back in the morning and given the jailor back his clothes — was trying to wake him up.

"What happened to you?" Amos asked, and Jack told him.

"What happened to you?" asked Jack, and Amos told him.

"Then we have been found out and all is lost," said the prince. "For it is noon already, and the sun is at its highest and hottest. The boat has docked two leagues short of over there, and the grey man must be about to go for the third mirror himself."

"May his head split into a thousand pieces," said Amos.

"Pipe down in there," said the jailor. "I'm trying to sleep." And he spread out his piece of grey canvas sail and lay down.

Outside, the water lapped at the ship, and after a moment Jack said, "A river runs by the castle of the Far Rainbow, and when you go down into the garden, you can hear the water against the wall just like that."

"Now don't be sad," said Amos. "We need all our wits about us."

From somewhere there was the sound of knocking.

"Though, truly," said Amos, glancing at the ceiling, "I had a

friend once named Billy Belay, an old sailor with a wooden leg, I used to play jackstraws with. When he would go upstairs to his room in the Mariner's Tavern, you could hear him walking overhead just like that."

That knocking came again.

"Only that isn't above us," said Jack. "It's below."

They looked at the floor. Then Jack got down on his hands and knees and looked under the cot. "There's a trap door there," he whispered to Amos, "and somebody's knocking."

"A trap door in the *bottom* of a ship?" asked Amos.

"We won't question it," said Jack, "we'll just open it."

They grabbed the ring and pulled the door back. Through the opening there was only the green surface of the water. Then, below the surface, Lea appeared.

"What are you doing here?" whispered Amos.

"I've come to help you," she said. "You have gotten two thirds of the broken mirror. Now you must get the last piece."

"How did you get here?" asked Jack.

"Only the shiny surface of things keeps us apart," said Lea. "Now if you dive through here, you can swim out from under the boat."

"And once we get out from under the boat," said Amos, "we can climb back in."

"Why should we do that?" asked Jack.

"I have a plan," said Amos.

"But will it work even if the grey man is already in the garden of violent colors and rich perfumes, walking past the pink marble fountains where the black butterflies glisten on their rims?" asked Jack.

"It will work as long as the silver-white unicorn guards the fragment of the mirror," said Amos, "and the grey man doesn't have his hands on it. Now dive."

The prince dove and Amos dove after him.

"Will you pipe down in there," called the jailor without opening his eyes.

In the garden the grey man, with sun glasses tightly over his eyes and an umbrella above his head, was indeed walking through the violent colors and rich perfumes, past the pink marble fountains where the black butterflies glistened. It was hot, he was dripping with perspiration, and his head was in agony.

He had walked a long time, and even through his dark glasses he could make out the green and red blossoms, the purple fruit on the branches, the orange melons on the vines. The most annoying thing of all, however, were the swarms of golden gnats that buzzed about

him. He would beat at them with the umbrella, but they came right back again.

After what seemed a long, long time, he saw a flicker of silver-white, and coming closer, he saw it was a unicorn. It stood in the little clearing, blinking. Just behind the unicorn was the last piece of the miror.

"Well it's about time," said the grey man, and began walking toward it. But as soon as he stepped into the clearing, the unicorn snorted and struck his front feet against the ground, one after the other.

"I'll just get it quickly without any fuss," said the grey man. But when he stepped forward, the unicorn also stepped forward, and the grey man found the sharp point of the unicorn's horn against the grey cloth of his shirt, right where it covered his belly button.

"I'll have to go around it then," said the grey man. But when he moved to the right, the unicorn moved to the right; and when he moved to the left, the unicorn did the same.

From the mirror there was a laugh.

The grey man peered across the unicorn's shoulder, and in the piece of glass he saw not his own reflection but the face of a young woman. "I'm afraid," she said cheerfully, "that you shall never be able to pick up the mirror unless the unicorn lets you, for it was placed here by a wizard so great and so old and so terrible that you and I need not worry about him."

"Then what must I do to make this stubborn animal let me by. Tell me quickly because I am in a hurry and have a headache."

"You must prove yourself worthy," said Lea.

"How do I do that?"

"You must show how clever you are," said Lea. "When I was free of this mirror, my teacher in order to see how well I had learned my lessons asked me three questions. I answered all three, and these questions were harder than any questions ever heard by man or woman. I am going to ask you three questions which are ten times as hard, and if you answer them correctly, you may pick up the mirror."

"Ask me," said the grey man.

"First," said Lea, "who is standing just behind your left shoulder?"

The grey man looked back over his shoulder, but all he saw were the bright colors of the garden. "Nobody," he said.

"Second," said Lea, "who is standing just behind your right shoulder?"

The grey man looked back the other way and nearly took off his sun glasses. Then he decided it was not necessary, for all he saw was a

mass of confusing colors. "Nobody," he said.

"Third," said Lea, "what are they going to do to you?"

"There is nobody there and they are going to do nothing," said the grey man.

"You have answered all three questions wrong," said Lea, sadly.

Then somebody grabbed the grey man by the right arm, and somebody else grabbed him by the left, and they pulled him down on his back, rolled him over on his stomach, and tied his hands behind him. One picked him up by the shoulders and the other by the feet, and they only paused long enough to get the mirror from the clearing, which the unicorn let them have gladly, for there was no doubt that they could have answered Lea's questions.

For one of the two was Amos, wearing the top half of the costume of the Prince of the Far Rainbow, minus a little green patch from the sleeve and a strip from the crimson cape; he had stood behind some bushes so the grey man could not see his less colorful pants. The other was Prince Jack himself, wearing the bottom of the custume, minus the white leather boot; he had stood behind a low-hanging branch so the grey man had not been able to see him from the waist up.

With the mirror safe — nor did they forget the grey man's umbrella and sun glasses — they carried him back to the ship. Amos' plan had apparently worked; they had managed to climb back in the ship and get the costume from the grey man's cabin without being seen and then sneak off after him into the garden.

But here luck turned against them, for no sooner had they reached the shore again when the sailors descended on them. The jailor had at last woken up and, finding his captives gone, had organized a searching party which set out just as Amos and the prince reached the boat.

"Crisscross, cross, and double cross!" cried the grey man triumphantly as once more Amos and Jack were led to the brig.

The trap door had been nailed firmly shut this time, and even Amos could not think of a plan.

"Cast off for the greyest and gloomiest island on the map," cried the grey man.

"Cast off!" cried the sailors.

"And do not disturb me till we get there," said the skinny grey man. "I have had a bad day today and my head is killing me."

The grey man took the third piece of mirror to his cabin, but he was too ill to fit the fragments together. So he put the last piece on top of the trunk, swallowed several aspirins, and lay down.

VII

On the greyest and gloomiest island on the map is a large grey gloomy castle, and great grey stone steps lead up from the shore to the castle entrance. This was the skinny grey man's gloomy grey home. On the following grey afternoon, the ship pulled up to the bottom of the steps, and the grey man, leading two bound figures, walked up to the door.

Later in the castle hall, Amos and the prince stood bound by the back wall. The grey man chuckled to himself as he hung up the two-thirds completed mirror. The final third was on the table.

"At last it is about to happen," said the grey man. "But first, Amos, you must have your reward for helping me so much."

He led Amos, still tied, to a small door in the wall. "In there is my jewel garden. I have more jewels than any man in the world. Ugh! They give me a headache. Go quickly, take your reward, and when you come back I shall show you a man living through the happiest moment of his life. Then I will put you and your jewels into the trunk with my nearest and dearest friend."

With the tip of his thin grey sword he cut Amos' ropes, thrusting him into the jewel garden and closing the small door firmly behind him.

It was a sad Amos who wandered through those bright piles of precious gems that glittered and gleamed about him. The walls were much too high to climb and they went all the way around. Being a clever man, Amos knew there were some situations in which it was a waste of wit to try and figure a way out. So, sadly, he picked up a small wheelbarrow lying on top of a hill of rubies and began to fill his pockets with pearls. When he had hauled up a cauldron full of gold from the well in the middle of the garden, he put all his reward in the wheelbarrow, went back to the small door and knocked.

The door opened and he was yanked through and bound up again. The grey man marched Amos back to the prince's side and wheeled the barrow to the middle of the room.

"In just a moment," said the thin grey man, "you will see a man living through the happiest moment of his life. But first I must make sure my nearest and dearest friend can see too." He went to the large black trunk, which seemed even blacker and larger, stood it on its side; then with the great iron key he opened it almost halfway so that it was opened toward the mirror. But from where Amos and Jack were, they could not see into it at all.

The grey man took the last piece of the mirror, went to the

wall, and fitted it in place, saying, "The one thing I have always wanted more than anything else, for myself, for my nearest and dearest friend, is a woman worthy of a prince."

Immediately there was thunder, and light shot from the restored glass. The grey man stepped back, and from the mirror stepped the beautiful and worthy Lea.

"Oh, happiness!" laughed the thin grey man. "She is grey too!"

For Lea was cloaked in grey from head to foot. But almost before the words were out, she loosed her grey cloak and it fell about her feet.

"Oh, horrors!" cried the thin grey man, and stepped back again.

Under her cloak she wore a scarlet cape with flaming rubies that glittered in the lightning. Now she loosed her scarlet cape and that too fell to the floor.

"Oh, misery!" screamed the grey man, and stepped back once more.

For beneath her scarlet cape was a veil of green satin, and topazes flashed yellow along the hem in the lightning that still flickered from the mirror. Now she threw the veil back from her shoulders.

"Oh, ultimate depression!" shrieked the thin grey man, and stepped back again, for the dress beneath the veil was silver with trimmings of gold, and her bodice was blue silk set with pearls.

The last step took the thin grey man right into the open trunk. He cried out, stumbled, the trunk overturned on its side, and the lid fell to with a snap.

And there wasn't any sound at all.

"I had rather hoped we might have avoided that," said Lea, as she came over to untie Jack and Amos. "But there is nothing we can do now. I can never thank you enough for gathering the mirror and releasing me."

"Nor can we thank you," said Amos, "for helping us do it."

"Now," said Jack, rubbing his wrists, "I can look at myself again and see why I am Prince of the Far Rainbow."

He and Lea walked to the mirror and looked at their reflections.

"Why," said Jack, "I am a prince because I am worthy to be a prince, and with me is a woman worthy to be a princess."

In the gilded frame now was no longer their reflection, but a rolling land of green and yellow meadows, with red and white houses, and far off a golden castle against a blue sky.

"That's the land of the Far Rainbow!" cried Jack. "We could almost step through into it!" And he began to go forward.

"What about me?" cried Amos. "How do I get home?"

"The same way we do," said Lea. "When we are gone, look into the mirror and you will see your home too."

"And that?" asked Amos, pointing to the trunk.

"What about it?" said Jack.

"Well, what's in it?"

"Look and see," said Lea.

"I'm afraid to," said Amos. "It has said such awful and terrible things."

"You afraid?" laughed Jack. "You, who rescued me three times from the brig, braved the grey swamp and rode the back of the North Wind?"

But Lea asked gently, "What did it say. I have studied the languages of men and perhaps I can help. What did it say?"

"Oh, awful things," said Amos, "like *onvbpmf*, and *elmblmpf*, and *orghmflbfe*."

"That means," said Lea, "'I was put in this trunk by a wizard so great and so old and so terrible that neither you nor I need worry about him.'"

"And it said *glumphvmr*, and *fuffle*, and *fulrmp*," Amos told her.

"That means," said Lea, "'I was put here to be the nearest and dearest friend to all those grim, grey people who cheat everybody they meet and who can enjoy nothing colorful in the world.'"

"Then it said *orlmnb*, and *mlpbgrm*, and *grublmeumplefrmp — hic!*"

"Loosely translated," said Lea, "'One's duty is often a difficult thing to do with the cheerfulness, good nature, and diligence that others expect of us; nevertheless ....'"

"And when the thin grey man fell into the trunk," said Amos, "it didn't make any sound at all."

"Which," said Lea, "can be stated as: 'I've done it.' Roughly speaking."

"Go see what's in the trunk," said Jack. "It's probably not so terrible after all."

"If you say so," said Amos. He went to the trunk, walked all around it three times, then gingerly lifted the lid. He didn't see anything, so he lifted it further. When he still didn't see anything, he opened it all the way. "Why, there's nothing in ..." he began. But then something caught his eye at the very bottom of the trunk, and he reached in and picked it up.

It was a short, triangular bar of glass.

"A prism!" said Amos. "Isn't that amazing. That's the most amazing thing I ever heard of."

But he was alone in the castle hall. Jack and Lea had already left. Amos ran to the mirror just in time to see them walking away across the green and yellow meadows to the

golden castle. Lea leaned her head on Jack's shoulder, and the prince turned to kiss her raven hair, and Amos thought: "Now there are *two* people living through the happiest moment of their lives."

Then the picture changed, and he was looking down a familiar, seaside, cobbled street, wet with rain. A storm had just ended and the clouds were breaking apart. Down the block the sign of the Mariner's Tavern swung in the breeze.

Amos ran to get his wheelbarrow, put the prism on top, and wheeled it to the mirror. Then, just in case, he went back and locked the trunk tightly.

Someone opened the door of the Mariner's Tavern and called inside, "Why is everybody so glum this evening when there's a beautiful rainbow looped across the world?"

"It's Amos!" cried Hidalga, running from behind the counter.

"It *is* Amos!" cried Billy Belay, thumping after her on his wooden leg.

Everyone else in the tavern came running outside too. Sure enough it was Amos, and sure enough a rainbow looped above them to the far horizons.

"Where have you been?" cried Hidalga. "We all thought you were dead."

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," said Amos, "for you are always saying you take no man's jabbering seriously."

"Any man who can walk out of a tavern one night with nothing and come back in a week with that —" and she pointed to the wheelbarrow full of gold and jewels "— is a man to be taken seriously."

"Then marry me," said Amos, "for I always thought you had uncommonly good sense in matters of whom to believe and whom not to. Your last words have proved you worthy of my opinion."

"I certainly shall," said Hidalga, "for I always thought you an uncommonly clever man. Your return with this wheelbarrow has proved *you* worthy of *my* opinion."

"I thought you were dead too," said Billy Belay, "after you ran out of here with that thin grey man and his big black trunk. He told us terrible stories of the places he intended to go. And you just up and went with him without having heard anything but the reward."

"There are times," said Amos, "when it is better to know only the reward and not the dangers."

"And this was obviously such a time," said Hidalga, "for you are back now and we are to be married."

"Well, come in, then," said Billy, "and play me a game of jackstraws, and you can tell us all about it."

They went back into the tavern, wheeling the barrow before them.

"What is this?" asked Hidalga as they stepped inside. She picked up the glass prism from the top of the barrow.

"That," said Amos, "is the other end of the far rainbow."

"The other end of the rainbow?" asked Hidalga.

"Over there," said Amos pointing back out the door, "is that end. And over there is this end," and he pointed out the front window, "and right here is the other end."

Then he showed her how a white light shining through it would break apart and fill her hands with all the colors she could think of.

"Isn't that amazing," said Hidalga. "That's the most amazing thing I ever heard of."

"That's exactly what I said," Amos told her, and they were both very happy, for they were both clever enough to know that when a husband and wife agree, it means a long and happy marriage is ahead.

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edited by Mark J. McGarry

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There have been so many flashes in the pan of science fiction that the little old utensil sometimes glitters like an old Busby Berkeley musical. Later admired for their color and flash, these instant successes were nonetheless reflective of glamorous showmanship that today looks a bit tacky, a little too gauche.

The subjects and themes of science fiction are gaudy enough that it seldom needs the banana headgear of Carmen Miranda or rigorously disciplined chorines moving in graceful symmetry to attract attention. Yet sf's history is filled with just such nonsensical gaudiness, from the endless magazine romances of men on alien worlds (impeccable motives for these heroes) and aliens on Earth (reprehensible motives for these creatures). Is it any wonder that most sf films of the 50s and 60s latched onto this visual bonanza and discarded any cerebral elements?

This analogy with film is not without a point.

I have on hand two novels by one of the new superstars of sf, Michael Bishop, who debuted in 1970 with two stories (the excellent but unheralded "If a Flower Could Eclipse," and the quiet but graceful "Pinon Fall") and has slowly but surely built an enviable reputation

RICHARD DELAP
Books

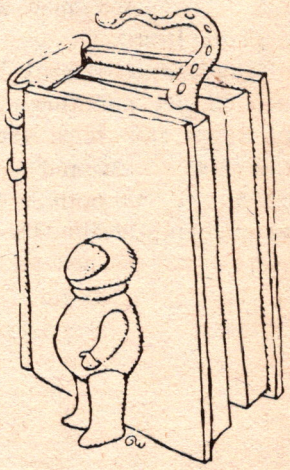
Stolen Faces by Michael Bishop, Harper & Row, $7.95

A Little Knowledge by Michael Bishop, Berkley/Putnam, $8.95

Down Here in the Dream Quarter by Barry N. Malzberg, Doubleday, $6.95

New Dimensions Science Fiction Number 7 edited by Robert Silverberg, Harper & Row, $8.95

Universe 7 edited by Terry Carr, Doubleday, $5.95



for literate stories that make fine use of colorful backgrounds. What worries me is that some film producer may latch onto one or both of Bishop's latest novels and decide that their visual possibilities as film are too good to pass up. What worries me even more is that Bishop might be unable to resist the big checks that come issuing out of Hollywood with the regularity of computer-issue data sheets. What worries me most of all is what we might see on the screen if such a sale takes place.

Stolen Faces seems to be exactly what the movie industry is looking for these days. There is a group of people known as muphormers, bearing hideous scars of a disease that ravages the body more violently then leprosy. The setting is another planet, Tezcatl, and the time is the 24th century, yet the primary locales are a scientific medical compound and ordinary countryside vistas, both easily and cheaply created for film. The plot is loaded with bloodshed and gore, ritual murders and cannibalism, extreme deformities and excessive cruelty, enough to make film producers drool with anticipation.

Of course some changes will have to be made. The 'hero,' Lucian Yeardance, is a withdrawn and troubled man, demoted from a "shipboard astrogation-and-engineering position" to kommissariat on Tezcatl. His duties are to watch after the muphormers and deliver insufficient food packets to them — watch after the "lepers" but do not concern yourself with their fate, as the other humans of the planet make expressly clear to Lucian. (As a typical film producer might say: Hmmph, well, we can fix that; make him an active rebel, working with his assistants to foment a revolt against this unconcern.)

The only really important women are a severely crippled old lady called the Radyan Maid (what's Bette Davis doing for the next couple of months?) and Gaea Zobay, a young girl with a shaved head (make her a blond, lacquered and coiffed, and keep those two top buttons open at all times!).

Bishop's story is one of love, its absence and its rediscovery — by Lucian, whose narrow focus on all levels blinds him (literally, before the story is out) to the love in his own actions; by Gaea and other associates at the compound, whose love develops despite their every effort to contain it; by the muphormers, who must be herded to love, both of self and of others, as mindless sheep are herded for their own unknowing benefit.

There is an abundance of exploitable elements in Bishop's story, so it is astonishing to see how the author keeps them under strict rein, always with a highly keyed

visual sense but also with a literary flair that says more by implication than by direct description. The writing itself is crafted with a precision that becomes obvious only as the novel progresses. The early portion of the book seems clumsy; sentences appear to be several words too long or too brief, paragraphs are cut abruptly short or dodder off into mystery. But the reader soon finds that he is being carefully manipulated into unease, able to share Lucian's confusion and frustration until at last it all begins to seem normal and commonplace — which in fact it is not, as we discover during the climactic Burgeontide celebration and its attendant grisliness, when we can no longer share Lucian's distortions (he is drugged at the time) and must pull away to see matters in their true state of perversity.

Stolen Faces is an intelligent and impressive novel that lends itself readily to mistreatment. *A Little Knowledge*, on the other hand, is far more accessible, at least on a superficial level. It is a culmination of a series of stories Bishop has been writing for several years, each of them providing background for the present novel (though it is not necessary to have read them, since Bishop fills in this material unobtrusively).

This time Bishop doesn't stray so far from the present, going a mere 100 years into the future in the domed city of Atlanta which is controlled by a Christian dictatorship. There are dissidents and revolutionists, but the Ortho-Urban leaders use deprivation and social ostracism to keep their ruthless control inflexible, an ugly political wedding of church and corporate tactics.

When Fiona Bitler and her husband, Emory Nettlinger, return from exile in Europe, they bring with them a visiting group of aliens from 61 Cygni. The Cygnostikoi create quite a stir in Atlanta, even from the virtual isolation of their penthouse in the Regency Hyatt House, but it's their conversion to Christianity that really sets the plot gears to spinning. The division of human opinion is stated quite clearly in a scene when a student suggests that perhaps "one Passion's enough to save both fallen species," to which his teacher replies "Jesus died to save *people*." One of the big problems, you see, is that the aliens are nothing like us, looking like creatures "disney'd out of wood, wire, metal, and devilish deceit ... spooky critters." Their dietary passions (apples and cats) do nothing to endear them to Julian Cawthorn, a writer who becomes a sort of combination emmissary/

spy/errandboy to the aliens.

Again the story is loaded with memorable 'visual' concepts — a climatic scene which mixes revolution, assassination, and an explosion that rips open the Atlanta dome has everything but camera instructions set down on paper for a film company — and again most of this is a splash of color alongside a basic concern with human interaction and philosophical concepts that strike with the force of a swollen river, altering course and flooding unexpected areas. The plot is much too involved to detail here, but a dozen major characters and many more minor but pivotal ones scurry through this shifting maze as if they are buffeted by the social and political activities of this future world rather than by an author plotting to reach a predestined conclusion. *A Little Knowledge* is a lively, thought-provoking novel that will exercise your brain as well as your eyeballs, pleasingly exhausting both.

If any author ever seemed more *un*suited to screen adaptation than Barry N. Malzberg, I don't know who it is. Yet more than one person (including myself) immediately noticed the striking similarities between the recent film *Network*, which won a number of Academy Awards last spring, and Malzberg's paranoia-mad novel *Revelations*. Considered a pariah by sf's old guard, who often treat him as if he were no more than a cynical joker who has nothing better to do than pull down the pants of science fiction and point out the pimples on its butt, he is probably the most misunderstood, mistreated, and hatefully regarded writer the field has ever seen.

It is no surprise to find that Malzberg is one of our most outspoken critics against feeble-minded reverence and bovine complacency. What bothers him is that people aren't concerned with distinguishing between pimples and cancerous lumps of growth, and he knows that a horrible death may await those who fail to take the time to make this important examination. The danger is not just to a single cell but to the entire body if something isn't done, and since Malzberg is a single cell in the body of humanity he is vitally concerned that we pay attention.

In his introduction to this collection of twenty-two stories, we are told that Malzberg's career as an sf writer is over, yet he refuses to be totally cowed and of his work believes that "some of it has value." It *does* have value, and if Malzberg feels his lofty ambitions were not fulfilled, he can rest assured that sf is not the same as it was when he entered the field. If anyone has raised the level of consciousness of

many sf readers, has induced them to look for higher levels of literacy, Malzberg is one of the pathfinders of a tumultuous era.

A number of these stories are quite trivial — yes, Barry, this time I do mean "trivial" — but the bulk of the material included in *Down Here in the Dream Quarter* is going to go a long way toward clearing out the cobwebs in your head. Like a surgeon with a laser he cuts deeply into the emotions that make us human, and whether he finds the blackest of rot or a humorous attitude toward something as irrelevant as the fad of streaking, his goals are those of enlightenment and truth.

My favorite story is "Transfer," which Malzberg compares to Ellison's "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs" but which he finds "a merry analysis ... altogether more optimistic and hopeful." I don't think I'd agree with such optimism (yet his argument is, dammit, convincing), in light of his subject of murder as a true human contact in a world of isolationists, but I know that it hit me with such power that it took me an hour to get my eyes uncrossed. A really incredible piece of fiction.

"A Galaxy Called Rome" is written 'In Memory of John W. Campbell,' giving us a concise history of the genre by introducing variations on a theme, which might be described as defining man's limits in the face of infinity. It tells of a ship trapped in "the black galaxy of a neutron star," and the author insists it is "one way in which the hard science story can hold some version of literary merit." It is an admirable work, chock full of good humor, intriguing speculations, and psychological honesty.

"Sedan Deville" is a funny satire — "the only science fiction story about Cadillacs ever to find the mass markets." "Leviticus: In the Ark" and "Isaiah" both deal with the Jewish faith, the latter with a message that transcends the religious 'ritual' and plummets with a horrible whisper into the heart of darkness. "After the Great Space War" is an hilarious tale of the Galactic Civil Service, with a serious undertone that comes clear when you realize that Malzberg isn't really exaggerating so much after all. Both "Trashing" and "The Destruction and Exculpation of Earth" deal expertly with themes of horror, not the things that lurk on the threshold of tomorrow but the things we live with, sleep with, and have lunch with every day.

Malzberg includes an afterword to each story, which helps us appreciate how and why he wrote these pieces, and two concluding essays, one of which ("Rage, Pain, Alienation and Other Aspects of

the Writing of Science Fiction") is loaded with ammunition for those who dislike him and heavy with truth-telling and sadness for those who admire him. If you're one of those fencesitters who hasn't taken the time to notice Barry Malzberg during the last ten years, *Down Here in the Dream Quarter* is a fine introduction to this disturbing, intriguing, and very talented man.

Next at hand are the latest editions of two anthology series, neither of which is as permanently established as Damon Knight's *Orbit* books but both of which are turning into familiar old acquaintances.

Robert Silverberg's *New Dimensions* has always impressed me as the most adventurous series outside of Knight's books, although the quality of individual stories occasionally sinks into sludge that I'm sure would be beneath Knight's notice. A couple of these clunkers appear in *New Dimensions 7*, their ineptitude embarrassing for author, editor and reader.

Marta Randall's "The State of the Art on Alyssum" concerns four shipwrecked aliens, each of a different species, and their effort to build a radio transmitter to signal for rescue. The editor calls it "playful, sparkling," but how he comes by such terms for this turgid, unimaginative, indulgent and poorly concluded item is beyond me. Randall is notable only for her annoying lack of wit and clumsy styleless prose. Equally as awful is Henry-Luc Planchat's "Several Ways, and the Sun," a boring and very nearly incomprehensible narrative about a far-future Earth kept intact by the music of a computer-piano and a long-dead musician. An underlying religious theme fails to unify Planchet's concept since it relies on a belief ('faith,' if you will) that is never justified factually *or* emotionally.

At the other end of the scale we find Phyllis and Alex Eisenstein's "You Are Here," a stylistic phenomenon that must be read to be appreciated. A synopsis cannot even hint at the powerful effects of this brilliantly accomplished story. I can say it deals with a child, conveying the unbounded emotional reactions of adolescence which are tied to love of parents and a buffer of fantasy delusions. I can say it uses a rather standard sf plot — life on a spaceship — in the most remarkable offtrail method I can ever remember seeing. I can say it jumbles time and juxtaposes individual scenes with some of the most intelligent perspective you're ever going to find in a short story. And I can say that young Cara is one of the most completely believable sympathetic and, as is eventually revealed, tragic heroines in sf.

But none of these comments can bring you even close to the effect the Eisensteins achieve. Don't miss this one.

Also impressive is the icy analysis of Barry Malzberg's "In the Stocks," dealing with the circumscribed limits applied to our basic sexuality which above all else should surely be the most diverse and expressive of our inherent abilities. Malzberg is not speaking of personal taste or preference here, but instead of the taste and preference that are forced upon us — and a more frightening, more damaging imprisonment than this does not exist.

Of the remaining eight stories, one of the more popular ones will likely be "Black at the Pit, from Pole to Pole" by Steven Utley and Howard Waldrop, which tells us what happened to Frankenstein's creature after it was lost in the "darkness and distance" at the conclusion of Shelley's novel. While primarily an adventure story, the authors work in numerous references to both real and imagined persons and events and literary groundworks (would you believe *Mocha Dick*?), yet the story is more than a broadbased pastiche, for there is a rather serious exploration of the creature's obsessions and efforts to find a place for himself. Each reader should be able to find something enjoyable here, although the ending is a bit disappointing since it just stops without bothering to reach a conclusion.

J. A. Lawrence's "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Bat" is minor-league but goodnatured fun, the sort of thing that might result if Lewis Carroll ran head-on into Stanislaw Lem, with a female cabin boy, Marybelle, serving as a stand-in for Alice on a world that vaguely recalls Lem's *Solaris*. John Shirley's "The Almost Empty Rooms" speculates that humans are but individual cells in gigantic "event-animals," creatures beyond our understanding. Some of the weird images are memorable (a "cloud of babies" forming in the sky a "carrousel of weightless, stark humanity" is one of the most bizarre), but I had the recurrent worry that either myself or Shirley had gone totally bonkers. I prefer to think it was the author.

Gregory Benford's "Knowing Her" is a hard, cynical look at the American way of life ... and death. It provides a sturdy springboard for serious thought, though it relies too much on insinuation rather than actualized incident. Fritz Leiber's "The Princess in the Tower 250,000 Miles High" takes only three pages to justify the oldest "sin" in the world in a new context on the moon, making an amusing leap directly from the fables of ancient Greece.

Additional stories by Gordon

Eklund ("The Retro Man"), Felix C. Gotschalk ("Home Sweet Geriatric Dome"), and A. A. Attanasio ("The Blood's Horizon") provide negligible backup.

I've never cared for Terry Carr's original anthologies, but *Universe 7* is one of the better entries in this series. From a total of eight new stories, three prove to be items right out of the jewel box.

Many of Gene Wolfe's best sf stories are effective because he knows that making the future convincing demands a fine sense of history, the ability to underscore a complex backdrop in a few choice words, and most of all a concentration on the people who make their future feel both lived in and conducive to their actions. Wolfe's abilities are now so precise that his new story, "The Marvelous Brass Chess-playing Automation," may represent his best work to date in the short story form. It takes place in a future Europe after war has set civilization back to more primitive standards, a world where war machines still operate but machine-power in everyday life is a rare and unusual sight. From the beginning we know the results must be tragic, but it is only gradually that we understand the almost Wagnerian power of the basic uncluttered drama. And with Wolfe's evocative descriptions enticing one with their beauty — *e.g.:* "the street [was] so hot that the dogs would not bark for fear of fainting, and the dust rolled away from the wheels in waves, like grain when foxes run through the fields" — readers should find this story exceptional, one that I fully expect to be a strong award contender next year.

I hesitate to try to explain "Ibid.," since George Alec Effinger's story of Cathy Schumacher, a teacher, depends more on mood than on plot. It is a disquieting and multilayered approach to how one woman discovers herself through the intervention of the inexplicable — messages from an unknown source, presented in "impossible" ways. Given a psychological explanation, the story isn't really sf at all, but Effinger doesn't let the reader (or Cathy) off with facile explanations. The writing is crisp, cool and startlingly efficient, delivering jabs of recognition that compound into an expert assault on our comprehension of comprehension.

Fritz Leiber's "A Rite of Spring" takes place in the world of a secret research complex, and its protagonist, Matthew Fortree, is a first-rank mathematician whose job is unquestionably a "hard science" one. But this aspect retreats into the background when Matthew's fervent wish during a "Gothic night," for a return to his childhood relationship to a purity of

numbers. The Pythagorean concept of numbers as a base and influence over all is used by Leiber to create a marvel of tour de force. Intellect and drama pervade the story equally through primary concept and a delightful running dialogue.

Carter Scholz, who debuted last year with the brilliant "The Eve of the Last Apollo" in *Orbit 18*, now utilizes the concept of machines that can "transfer your consciousness into the mind of someone in the past." The story takes place in the year 2016 and concerns a 35 year-old musicologist whose passion to study Beethoven leads to a nightmare situation of time paradoxes. This story is more predictable and not so impressive as Scholz's first effort, but is enhanced by clever writing and solid characterization.

Brian W. Aldiss' "My Lady of the Psychiatric Sorrows" is interesting if not truly satisfying. It is respectable, however, if only for the fact that it deals with a subject often overlooked by sf writers — namely, that after the collapse of technological civilization, individuals will each find their own way to adjustment. The contrast between a man and his wife makes a valid and dramatic point, though Aldiss doesn't really make much of a story from it.

Julian Reid's "Probability Storm" is a dud that mixes odd characters in a friendly neighborhood bar, a Probability Storm (from the "Other Side," whatever that is) and its attendant anomalies, a non-corporeal narrator, and a host of mischievous gremlins — material for a light souffle that Reid bakes and bakes and *bakes* until it's as useless as the blackened crust on an oven. Robert Chilson's "People Reviews" is a heavyhanded, over-cautious and probably over-serious look at a future critic who dissects a new art form. And R. A. Lafferty is back with Barnaby Sheen and his mad lab crew once again in "Brain Fever Season," but it's one of the weakest in an erratic group of stories, a product of what looks to me like dull brain season.

Ed Ferman gets this magazine out every month and manages to give us an impressive amount of top-quality fiction each year (and, no, he's not paying me a bonus to say this; he knows I'd just spend it on *F&SF* T-shirts anyway, and he doesn't really want the lagniappe of a mad critic wearing his shirt to the premiere of *Ronald Reagan vs. the Giant Siphonaptera*). Silverberg and Carr each turn out one anthology of original stories annually, and this year each has given us enough fine stories to merit your attention.

But I do wonder ... why, *every* year, do those obvious clunkers keep turning up? You tell me ...

Robert Bloch's new story concerns one Charlie Randall, who picks up a bargain camera at a garage sale, snaps a few photos and develops nothing but dead bodies.

What You See Is What You Get

by ROBERT BLOCH

Never mind about inflation. You can still buy yourself a million dollars worth of trouble for ten bucks.

That's what Charlie Randall paid for the camera, and he thought he was getting a bargain.

It was one of those models with a self-developing photo pack already in place, but no exposures had been taken. The outfit retailed for something like forty bucks plus tax, so it looked like a good deal. There were even a couple of flash cubes in the box — the original owner had been all ready to take some pictures.

But dead men tell no tales, and they're not so hot on photography either. So Randall picked up the camera for a ten-spot at a Saturday garage sale conducted by the executor of the estate.

Randall didn't know the executor; he just happened to be driving past the house when he saw the sign. He didn't know the dead man, but from the looks of some of the stuff on display he must have been a real nostalgia freak. There were cartons and stacks of old books and magazines all over the place, but no good stuff, like stereo equipment or transistor radios or portable color TV. And the furniture was old and beat-up too. The only new item in the lot was the camera; picking it up cheap was a lucky break.

The first thing Charlie Randal did when he got home that afternoon was to take a picture of Butch.

Butch was a big German shepherd that Randall kept on a long chain when he gave him the run of the yard. Even so, he got a lot of static from the neighbors; they couldn't figure why Randall needed a dog that big and that mean. But then they couldn't figure what line of work Randall was in, or what he had stashed away in the cellar.

What you don't know won't hurt you, and having Butch around kept people from knowing. If they tried to find out, they'd get hurt soon enough, because Butch was a real guard dog.

Even Randall didn't trust him too far, but he wanted to check out how the camera worked, and Butch was the handiest subject around. Matter of fact, he was the only one around. Randall lived alone and didn't encourage visitors, not even on business; he liked to do his deals away from home.

Anyway, he read the instructions on the box the camera came in, got Butch to heel next to the kitchen door, attached one of the flash-cube units, and took the shot.

Nothing to it, easiest thing in the world; and when he pulled the exposed film out, the picture came into focus. A little blurry at first, but then it got clearer and sharper and the colors came out to make a perfect print.

Randall wanted to try another, but it was getting late and Saturday was always a big night for him. So he went down into the cellar and got his merchandise and took it out to the car by the back entrance to the garage. After that he shaved, dressed, fed Butch and locked him inside the house when he left.

Everything worked out for him that evening, and Randall was feeling pretty good when he drove in around two in the morning.

That is, until he opened the front door and Butch tried to kill him.

If he hadn't heard the growling before the dog made a leap for his throat, it would have gotten him for sure. As it was, he jumped back just in time, slamming the door. He could hear Butch snarling inside, snarling and clawing away, and there was no percentage trying to open that door again.

So Randall went around the back, tiptoeing through the yard and listening to make sure that Butch was still up front.

Easing the back door open very quietly, Randall let himself in. He switched on the kitchen light, and in just about two seconds flat the dog came charging through from the hallway. His eyes were red and ropy strands of saliva dripped from his fangs as he opened his jaws wide and hurtled across the room.

Randall stepped back quickly, across the threshold of the open doorway behind him. As the dog sprang, the door slammed shut just in time.

Standing outside, Randall stared at the door as it shuddered at the impact of Butch's launching attack. There was a piercing howl — then a thud — then silence.

Randall stood waiting for the onslought to resume, but he heard nothing, not even the sound of

panting. Moving around to the side of the house, he peered through the kitchen window.

Butch was lying on the floor near the door. One look was enough to establish his condition: the foam-flecked jaws were slack, the glaring eyes glazed, and the rib cage no longer rose and fell in the movements of breathing. The dog had flipped out and it was dead.

Randall had a hard time dragging the body into the garage, but there was no other place to put it until Monday when he could call the animal shelter. Maybe he'd dispose of the body himself tomorrow.

Either way, this had loused up his evening, and when he got back to the house he poured himself a couple of stiff shots before he went to bed.

Even so, he had trouble falling asleep. Funny how things work out sometimes. One minute he'd been on top of the world, and the next — if he hadn't been quick — he'd have been dead. And now the dog was dead; all he had left was a picture.

That was funny, too — him taking the picture only a couple of hours before Butch jumped him. He wondered just what had happened; from the looks of things the dog must have freaked-out with rabies. Come to think of it, he hadn't touched his food or his water. Randall had heard something about dogs not drinking water when they got rabies. Oh, well, you can't win 'em all.

So on Sunday afternoon he made the long haul out to the quarry and dumped Butch's body. After that, he loosened up a little, and by the time he got back to the house he felt okay again.

Until he saw the car.

It was a big Caddie with a big man sitting behind the wheel smoking a big cigar. Randall spotted it through the window right after he came in, watched it pull up to the curb and park. The big man was looking at a piece of paper like he was checking the address of the house, and then he got out of the car and started up the walk.

Randall didn't waste any time. He had the cellar door locked before the front doorbell rang, and the gun was in his pocket when he walked back through the hall. There was a chain on the front door, but no sense taking chances.

The bell rang again.

He opened the door a smidge, just far enough to tighten the chain, and the big man smiled at him.

"Mr. Randall?" he said. "Mr. Charles Randall?"

"That's right."

"I'd like to talk to you. Mind if I come in?"

Randall was ready to ask him if he had a search warrant, but

the man didn't give him a chance. "My name is Frank Lumley," he said. "The executor of the estate."

"What?"

"The Desmond estate. You were at the garage sale yesterday, weren't you?"

Randall stared at the big man, trying to see what was underneath his smile. "How come you know about that?"

"This check." Lumley held it up. "Your name and address are on it. If you'll just let me explain —"

It sounded legit. So Randall took the chain off the door and let him in. He led Lumley to the living room and sat down.

"Okay," he said. "What's on your mind?"

"I understand you purchased a camera at the sale. Is that correct?"

"Right."

"Well, I'm afraid there's been a slight error. One of my secretaries copied the inventory of what was to be sold, along with another listing of items which were to be held back for the heirs. Somehow she made a mistake and put the camera on the wrong list. It's not for sale."

"I bought it," Randall said.

"So you did. And for ten dollars." Lumley held up the check, still smiling. "Now I'd like to buy it back. For twenty."

"No way. That's a brand-new camera, it'd run you at least forty at a store."

"All right, I'll give you forty."

The big man said it so fast that Randall knew there had to be a catch to it.

"Not interested." He shook his head.

"Fifty?"

"Forget it."

The living room was comfortably cool, but Lumley was perspiring. "Now see here, Mr. Randall. I don't like playing games —"

"Neither do I." Randall was watching him sweat. "So stop with the hype and tell me what's so special about that camera."

"Nothing," Lumley said. "But it's one of the last things Desmond bought, and the heirs would like to have it for sentimental reasons. I got a cablegram this morning from Buenos Aires —"

"Hold it." Randall frowned. "Who's Desmond?"

"Sorry about that." Lumley nodded. "Desmond the Great. Big-time vaudeville magician — retired years ago. His two sons took over the act. They're touring it in South America. Flew home for the funeral, then went back to finish up the engagement. But they looked over their father's stuff and helped make out the inventory. He'd accumulated a lot of items as a hobby over the years, and they don't want to break up the collection."

"Bull," said Randall. "The camera's something special, isn't

it? Something gimmicked for the magic act."

"If that's so, I wasn't informed." Lumley took out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "Look, all I'm doing is following orders. You can buy an exact duplicate of that camera in any drug or department store and make yourself a profit to boot. I'll give you a hundred dollars and that's my final offer."

"No way." Randall stood up.

"But the Desmond brothers —"

"Tell them to get in touch with me when they come back."

Lumley sighed. "All right. They should be winding up their tour in a few days. Promise me you won't dispose of the camera until you hear from them."

"Don't worry." Randall smiled. "I'll take good care of it."

And that was that. Or almost so.

Randall was standing at the front window watching Lumley walk out to his car when the impulse hit him. Maybe if he took a few more shots, he'd figure out what the gimmick was.

He reached into the desk drawer where the camera was stashed, pulled it out and focused on the big man as he slid behind the wheel, catching him in the view finder just before the car pulled away.

Then he yanked the tab and waited for the print to develop. Sure enough, there was Lumley in the Caddie, big as life.

Randall peered closely at the print, checking it for anything that looked unusual. All he saw was an ordinary photo.

But there had to be a gimmick, some reason why Lumley and the heirs wanted the camera. He'd have to take a few more shots soon, and if that still didn't tell him, the next step would be to disassemble the camera itself.

Meanwhile he had work to do. He put the camera and print back in the drawer, then prepared to drive off on his nightly rounds.

Sunday night was always good for heavy dealing because a lot of Randall's clients were fresh out and hurting after a weekend high. He laid a lot of lids at rock joints around town, got rid of some smack and everything went down without a hassle. But it took plenty of chasing, and by the time he got home again, Randall was really wiped out.

He was still in the sack the next morning when Josie arrived for her weekly cleaning session. Randall let her in and fixed himself some breakfast, then dressed and shaved. After that he went down to the cellar to check his inventory. He was low on grass, and so he came back up and called Gonzales to meet him up on Mulholland at nine and make a buy.

It was after lunch when he went into the front room and found Josie blubbering as she vacuumed the rug.

"Hey," he said. "What's with you?"

She just shook her head and went on crying.

"Shut that damn thing off," he told her. "Here, have some Kleenex."

He waited while she blew her nose and the sniffling stopped. "Okay, that's better. Now sit down and tell me what's bugging you."

Josie sat down beside the desk, shaking her head. "Ain't nothing to concern you, Mr. Randall. 'Jes a personal thing, is all."

Josie was a good old broad, a little short on smarts but a hard worker, and she'd been with him for years. Randall really didn't like to see her uptight this way. "Come on," he said. "Lay it on me."

What Josie spilled was like some kind of soap opera — one son up for grand theft, auto; another younger kid running with a gang; the dude she'd been shacking-up with walked out last night after ripping off the money she'd been saving to pay for car repairs.

"Cool it," Randall told her. "The kids are old enough to do their own thing — you can't take the rap for them now. And this guy who splits sounds like a real loser. Cheer up, there's plenty more where he came from."

Josie shook her head. "Ain't no use trying to find me another man, not any more. Kids gone, money's gone, sorrow here to stay. I about ready to wrap it all up."

"You'll get somebody, wait and see."

"I 'jes a beat-up ol' cleaning lady. Nobody gonna want no part of me." Josie looked as if she was ready to start bawling again.

"That's when he got the idea. He went over to the desk, took out the camera.

Josie stared at him. "What you got there?"

"Sit still. I want to take your picture."

"Me — the way I look?"

"Right." Randall nodded as he focused. "Pictures don't lie. You're a sharp-looking woman and I'm going to show you. Now hold still." He pressed the button. "Got it."

He pulled the print out and set it down on the desk top to develop. Gradually the picture came into view.

"Here, see for yourself." He showed her the photo. "You got no problem, believe me."

"Maybe so." Josie looked doubtful, but at least she wasn't crying any more.

Randall gave her a big grin. "Now stop goofing off and get with it."

"Right on."

She started vacuuming again and he went downstairs to figure up the week's take.

By the time he finished and came up from the cellar, it was getting dark and Josie had already left. Randall went to the front door to see if the paper had arrived.

He took it into the kitchen to read while he ate his supper. After fixing a salad and heating up some beans, he carried his plate to the table and sat down; then he unfolded the paper to look at the front-page news. That's when the crunch came.

Attorney Killed
In Car Accident

Frank M. Lumley, 47, prominent local attorney, suffered fatal injuries late Sunday afternoon when the automobile he was driving crashed head-on into an embankment at 4125 S. Cooleigh Drive. According to police reports a steering-wheel defect caused the car to go out of control and swerve into the concrete retaining wall. A coroner's spokesman said death resulted from ....

Randall didn't read any more, nor did he eat.

He was still shaken when he drove off to keep his appointment with Gonzales. Somehow he got through the deal, but it was all a blur; his thoughts kept going back to his meeting the day before. Lumley must have been killed shortly after he left the house, because Cooleigh Drive was less than a mile away.

It was an accident, of course, just like the police said. Damned automatic power-assists are always conking out in an emergency. But something about the way it happened kept spooking Randall.

Not until he got back home did he come up with the answer. Two deaths in a row, that was the downer. First the dog, then Lumley.

But that was just coincidence. Nothing to tie them together — or was there?

Then he remembered the photos. He'd taken a picture of the dog and he'd taken a picture of the attorney. And today he'd taken a picture of Josie —

He was out of the car, into the house and on his way to the front room when he heard the phone ring in the hall.

Even before he picked it up he had this sick feeling, almost as if he knew what the voice would say. The choked-up voice of Ira, Josie's youngest boy.

"Momma's dead. I come home tonight, she lying on the bathroom floor. Swallowed a whole bottle full of reds the doctor gave her for sleeping —"

It went on and on, and Randall could hear his own voice saying all the right things, telling the kid she'd been okay when she left the house, and if there was anything he could do —

He knew what he had to do, of course. When the kid finally hung up, Randall ran into the front room, turned on the lamp, took Josie's picture from the desk top.

There she was, sitting in the chair alongside the desk, in full focus and natural color. And there, resting on the desk beside her, was something neither she nor he had noticed when they looked at the photo.

A little plastic bottle, filled with red pills.

Randall blinked and stared down at the desk top. He didn't see any pill bottle now; there never had been one when he took the shot.

But the bottle was in the picture.

He reached into the drawer, scrabbling around until he found the other photos he'd taken — the pictures of Lumley and the dog.

Could the pictures be warnings? Did they predict how death would come?

With Josie it was the pills. And suddenly he realized that the shot of Lumley showed him sitting in the car that killed him. But what about Butch? There was nothing in his photo except the dog.

Then he remembered that rabies was a disease, some kind of virus, and you couldn't see the germs. They were invisible, but they were in the picture — in the dog, in its future. That camera had to be gimmicked after all. But how?

He was just reaching for it when someone started knocking on the front door. Hastily he dropped the photos into the drawer, slammed it shut, then hurried into the hall.

Through the peephole he saw the stranger standing outside; some young dude in blue jeans. He had light-brown hair, cut fairly short, and a small sandy beard, and he looked harmless enough, but you never know.

Randall opened the door on its chain, just enough to get a better glimpse of his visitor, and the young dude squinted at him.

"Charles Randall?" he said.

"Yeah."

"I'm Milton Desmond."

Desmond — that was the magician's name. This must be one of his sons.

"Please, Mr. Randall. I've got to see you —"

Randall took off the chain, opened the door. He led young Desmond into the front room and sat down behind the desk.

"You're early," he said. "I thought you weren't coming back from South America until later this week."

Desmond blinked. "Then you know?"

"Lumley told me." Randall nodded, poker-faced. "Where's your brother?"

"Mike stayed to wrap up the final performance. But when we didn't hear from Lumley over the weekend, he told me to hop a plane and find out what happened."

"You know what happened if you read the papers."

"Yes." Desmond stared at him. "But *how* did it happen?"

Randall shrugged. "Accident. He was okay when he left here."

"Then he did see you."

"We talked."

"What about?"

Randall shook his head. "Let's cut the stalling," he said. "He made a pitch and I turned him down. The camera's right here in the drawer."

"You haven't taken any pictures yet, have you?"

Randall played it very straight. "What difference does it make?"

"None." But Milt Desmond looked plenty worried. "The thing is, my brother and I want that camera and we're prepared to pay for it."

"How much?"

"Anything within reason. Five hundred dollars."

Randall felt a little shiver of excitement tingle along his spine. He'd been right about his hunch. But when he spoke his voice faked surprise. "For a forty-dollar camera?" he said.

"I'm sure Mr. Lumley told you why we're interested — the last purchase dad made for his collection — it's a matter of personal sentiment —"

"Don't give me any scam," Randall said. "There's got to be something more for that kind of money."

Desmond frowned. "All that Mike and I know is that my father was into magic."

"Sure. Lumley told me he was a magician."

"I'm not talking about stage illusions. His hobby was occult phenomena."

"He believed that stuff?"

"Not at first. As a performer he exposed fake mediums and phoney mystics. But the more he investigated, the more he was convinced that some psychics had genuine powers. There was one man — I don't even know his name — that dad worked with closely. He claimed he could predict the future."

"Fortune telling?"

"More than that. He believed there are forces controlling our lives which science refuses to recognize. When palmists, astrologers or clairvoyants make accurate predictions, it's put down as guesswork, coincidence. But he felt that if such powers could be demonstrated by

some kind of mechanical device, it would be accepted as real proof. He was working on a method when he died of a heart attack, just weeks before dad passed away. In his last letter to Mike and me, dad said he had something important to show us when we got back."

"The camera?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's all a hype, but Mike thinks —" Desmond broke off and took a deep breath. "I'll give you a thousand dollars," he said.

"For something that may turn out to be a fake?" Randall smiled.

"I'll take that chance." Desmond reached for his wallet, but Randall shook his head.

"Let me think it over first."

"But Mr. Randall —"

"You staying in your father's place over on Clairmont? Okay, suppose I get in touch with you tonight."

"Couldn't you make it sooner?"

"Tonight." Randall stood up and escorted his visitor to the front door, then watched him move down the walk and enter his car. Desmond smiled, but Randall stood waiting.

As Desmond started the engine and moved off, his smile vanished; his bearded face freezing into a grimace of anger and frustration.

Randall turned away. Good thing he'd waited — there was no mistaking that look. The dude was plenty shook up, probably blaming himself for spilling what he knew about the camera and wondering what Randall was going to do.

Well, that made two of them. Because he didn't know what to do. A thousand bucks was a thousand bucks. But on the other hand, a camera that could predict how you'd die —

Such information could be valuable to the right parties. Old folks, rich people with cancer, heart conditions — they'd want to know. Suppose there was a doctor who could really call the shots for them, let them know if they'd recover from illness or pull through an operation without a hitch? Word about such an M.D. would get around fast, and it would be worth a hell of a lot more than a thousand dollars to have such power.

That's how he figured, and the Desmond brothers must have come up with the same answer. No wonder they were so hot to get hold of the camera. The look on Milt Desmond's face was a dead giveaway.

Dead giveaway.

Randall scowled as the idea hit him. Suppose he went to Desmond tonight and said the deal was off. Just how far would this dude go to get what he wanted?

There was one sure way of finding out.

Randall went over to the desk,

took out the camera, carried it to the bedroom. He stood in front of the big mirror set in the bathroom door, focusing on his own image.

He hesitated, conscious of the sudden uneasiness surging and churning within him, and the hands holding the camera began to shake. Did he really want to know his own future?

But he had no choice. Randall steadied himself, then pressed the button. He pulled the tab, carried the exposed print over to the window. Standing in the sunlight, he watched the outlines of the photograph emerge.

There he was, clearly established in front of the mirror, holding the camera.

For a moment he felt his panic subside — until he realized the picture was still developing. And now another image came into view behind him; the blurred image of a man in motion. Randall stared at the brown hair, the neatly trimmed sandy beard, and recognized Milt Desmond. Milt Desmond — with fury in his face and an upraised knife in his hand.

Pictures don't lie, and what he'd suspected was true. Milt Desmond was going to kill him.

Unless, of course, he gave him the camera. Gave him something that could be worth how much — maybe a million?

"No way," Randall muttered.

Then he thought of the way, and grinned.

That night be climbed into his car, drove over to the Desmond house on Clairmont, and knocked on the door. Milt Desmond let him in.

"You alone?" Randall asked.

"Of course." Desmond's face relaxed in relief as he noted the brown paper bag Randall held in his gloved hand.

"You brought the camera," he said. "Let's see it."

Randall shook his head. "Let's see the money first."

Desmond smiled and reached for his wallet, and Randall pulled a revolver out of the brown paper bag to shoot him through the heart.

It was all very neat. At a three-foot range there was no chance of missing, and the silencer worked perfectly. The silence wasn't even broken by a thud, because Randall caught the body before it hit the floor.

He lugged it out the back way to where his car was parked in the alley, trunk already unlocked. The neighboring houses were dark — Randall had checked them out before he came in — and in less than a minute the body was safely stowed away as the car moved off.

It had been a long trip to the quarry when he disposed of Butch, and this time it seemed even longer. But Randall had a chance to relax

and case the scene carefully before he drove in to tumble Desmond's corpse over the side. It was hard work climbing down the slope and even harder work covering the body with those big hunks of loose shale, but it had to be neatly done.

When he finished he clambered to the top, backed his car out on the lonely side road, then took a rake from where he'd stashed it on the rear seat. He carried it into the quarry and carefully smoothed loose dirt over tire tracks and footprints. Neatness counts.

Neat work and neat thinking. That was the answer, and Randall began to unwind as he drove home. He took a shot of Scotch before he went to bed and slept like a baby.

It wasn't surprising, because in a way he *was* a baby — he'd just been reborn. Picture or no picture, magic or no magic, he had nothing to fear now. Milt Desmond was snuffed and he was alive.

In the morning he made some calls, setting up buys for the customers he'd neglected last night. Then he stocked his merchandise under the car mats and went to work.

Daytime dealing always involved extra precautions and took a lot more time. It was dark when Randall finished up and got back to the house. He'd put the whole affair out of his mind while he was gone, but now he was ready to figure the next move.

The first thing he did was check on the camera and prints. They lay undisturbed in the desk drawer, and Randall carried them into the bedroom, spreading them out on the bed so that he could see the whole lot at the same time. It always helps when a salesman knows exactly what he's selling, and this would be the biggest sales-pitch he'd ever planned.

If he could get together with the right doctor, he could forget about dealing from now on — no more scuffling, no more risks, no more long hours and short money. He began to think about the M.D.s he knew, wondering which one to approach first and just how he'd make his pitch.

That's where the pictures would come in — they were his samples, his proof. Gazing at them now, he began to run through the routine.

First Butch, of course — then Lumley in his car — then Josie and the bottle of pills. Whichever doctor he contacted, he'd show the photos and let him check them out. He could only give his word about what happened to the dog, but the newspapers would back him up on Lumley and Josie.

Randall's eyes went to the last photo and he frowned. This picture he wouldn't show, because it could blow the whole deal. Milt Desmond hadn't killed him — which meant

the camera wasn't always right. Matter of fact, he'd better not mention Desmond at all or repeat that talk about magical powers.

And maybe that's what it was, really — just talk. Dogs do get rabies, people die in car accidents or wipe themselves out with pills. Taking these pictures beforehand could still be coincidence. That's what it had to be, because what the last one showed had never happened. It never could happen now unless Milt Desmond rose from the dead, climbed out of the quarry and came after him with a knife.

Randall stared again at the last photo, seeing himself in front of the mirror with the camera in his hand while Milt Desmond loomed up behind him ready to strike.

The camera never lies. But it had lied about him.

Why?

He picked up the camera and carried it over to the light. Once again he debated about opening it up, taking it apart to see what was inside; there must be something he could find. But then he'd run the risk of damaging it or not being able to put the pieces back together again.

Still he had to know. Magic or gimmick, there was a secret here, and he needed the answer. Maybe the first step before doing anything drastic was just to take another shot of himself and see how it compared with the other one. That might give him a clue. Randall moved up to the mirror, focusing on his reflection.

It was then that the bedroom door opened silently and the figure loomed up swiftly behind him — the figure of the brown-haired man with the neatly trimmed beard. There was fury in his face and an upraised knife in his hand.

Randall just had time to recognize Milt Desmond as the knife came down.

Nobody comes back from the dead.

That was Randall's last thought before he died, and of course he was right.

But the camera doesn't lie.

And Milt Desmond's brother Mike was an identical twin.

ANSWER TO SEPTEMBER ACROSTIC

"It was the sound of ten thousand people screaming with the pain of the same wound. Ten thousand people who when they had recovered from the shock found themselves completely unharmed. But that was the end of that bullfight, and indeed of all bullfighting for the news spread rapidly." Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhoods End*.

Zenna Henderson, who contributed the very popular "People" series to F&SF, returns with a rare new short story.

The First Stroke

by ZENNA HENDERSON

Well, I had this stroke. That was a foolish thing to do. We Martins don't have strokes. We go puttering along into our eighties or nineties, more or less in full possession of our faculties, until our hearts turn off with a click, and we go back to God. It's a nice, comfortable arrangement, when you think of it, though that click sometimes has come at most inopportune moments — or places.

And here I am a Martin and only into my seventies and I had this stroke! No warning. No preliminaries. Just, bingo! It was, to say the least, interesting.

I was out mowing my side lawn and cussing the mounds where those red ants — harvester ants, I think — anyway, those big red ants had come out of their holes after winter hibernation and had heaped up gravel around the holes, and made long, thin trails radiating out over my lawn. Those mounds raise Cain with the mower, and, with them and the trails, my side lawn always looks ragged and patchy. I've fought those ants every year of my life, but it's still a Mexican stand-off.

I remember that I took a step that never stopped. After the click of the mower against the cement sidewalk, all sound stopped. Oh, it was a wild one, all right! But I was Me all the time, real interested in everything, not scared or hurt, just taking it all in.

First, the world speeded up its whirling, yanking me along, until it almost pulled me out of Me, but I hung on tight. First, I was way, way up there, looking down on my house and lot, the lot no bigger than a playing card, way, way down there, with a little black speck near one side. That was me. And things kept shooting back smaller and smaller as if I were a train, rushing away from Earth. Then everything

came back, with such a surge that house and trees and grass all shot up around me like a fountain. Then I was way down, so little that I was watching a new row of cells push a blade of grass up like pushing up a car radio antenna.

Then everything began to twist and swing again, and colors came back, vivid enough to drown me, and sounds, and everything louder and brighter and faster until there was a wild shriek of brakes and something shortcircuited. Flat, empty gray was all there was.

Detail came back, bit by bit, like sketching in, three dimensional. My face was propped up on the edge of the sidewalk. The stubbly green poked at my jaw and the edge of the sidewalk was pressing across my cheek like a hammer handle. I'm not sure my eyes were open, but I could see. First, the rough gray-white plane of the walk, a crack diagonally across from over there to under my cheek, and, farther off, the line between two blocks of the sidewalk. Along the edges, I could see the grass, still and blunt-topped where I'd just cut it. I could see and sort of feel, but couldn't move an eyewinker.

Then I saw the ants.

They were plunging along in neat rows, carrying all sorts of stuff, one line crossing my line of vision from one edge to the other, on the way to the nest. And with my eyes seeing as they were, those ants looked as big as horney-toads to me.

Son-a-gun, I thought. *If they get to me, this is going to get* real *interesting!* Those big red ants have a sting like a white-hot poker, hanging on with their pincher jaws and curling their rear ends up and jabbing in that formic acid. Some say they only bite, some say they only sting. Some say they do both. But whatever they do do, it hurts like billy-be-damn, and I swell up like a poisoned pup.

Hey! What if those things get real interested in me and find a way in. And bite! And close up my air passages! Brother, that'd be all she wrote!

I tried to figure out if my mouth was open or not. But, even so, there was nostrils and ears! So I got plenty interested in those ants!

One ant went by with a twig. One — no, two — ants with seeds — looked like Johnson grass seeds. One ant with a block of something — looked like sugar. One vehicle with armor plate and a whip antenna. One ant with —

Vehicle? Armor plate! Whip antenna!

I tried to look at the thing again, but it was already gone from my line of sight!

One ant with a grasshopper leg. One ant with a crumb of bread. One ant with a huge piece of leaf

throwing it off-balance about every four steps. One vehicle with armor plate and a whip antenna!

I watched as hard as I could until it was gone out of my sight. It had wheels or treads under it, and something moving inside where the driver should be. Now *this* was interesting!

The ants scooted on by, ignoring me, except one that laid its Johnson grass seed down and came over, waving its antenna inquiringly at me, one of its front legs lifted like a pointer. I thought *Shoo! Scat!* at it until it went back and picked up its seed and rushed off. And, at intervals, three or four ants apart, those armor-plated vehicles with whip antennas.

Then one of *them* wheeled out of line and up so close to me that I couldn't see it any more. But I could hear! Sound was back, wavering in and out like the radio at night in a fringe area. I could hear the whisper of the ants' feet as they scurried past. I think I even heard the crash of the atoms speeding up in the sidewalk as the near-noon sun heated it up more and more. Then voices came in, roaring louder than Niagara, then softer than snow-on-snow, but always with a fine thread of intelligibility, no matter the loudness or softness.

"... unpleasant being so small. We can't get a true perspective —"

"... easier to be launched and travel small than large. We should be resized soon after we all rendezvous."

"Shook! I wonder if we'll meet with much hostility. These creatures seem peaceable enough. Can't get used to totaling a population."

"Hazards of the game. We never initiated destruction."

"Never bother with much questioning, either. Oh, well, these creatures have no cerebration to speak of."

"But they aren't dominant. You can see a portion of one of the dominants above us here."

"Not very active. Can't pick up any —"

"Not characteristic. Almost moribund, unfortunately. We were warned about triggering, accidentally or purposely, any of our — there's Vehicle 67 —"

Then, son-a-gun, if they didn't wheel out into the line of traffic and scoot off! *Two* vehicles, with armor plate and whip antennas. One ant with a melon seed, one ant with a crumb of bread — brown —

The hard hotness of the sidewalk began burning into my cheek, and a thousand needles began jabbing my chin. There was a sudden in-wash of noise, punctuated by the thud of footsteps on the sidewalk.

Uh, oh! I thought *Here comes that old biddie!* It *would* be her to

find me sprawled helplessly on the ground. There was a shriek like an air horn, and a crashing splush.

Knew it, I thought, closing my eyes, patiently uprolled. *There goes the Jello! Lessee, this is Tuesday? Yep, banana Jello with pineapple in it.*

That old biddie next door. Silly thing. In her fifties and still man-hunting. Even at fifty, she's too old for me. Born old, I guess. And I never did like jello all that much. Oh, well, maybe I can use it now, since my jaws don't seem to be working. But she probably won't bring any more. What good'd I be to her now? Can't move. Can't talk. Can't see through all the swirling darkness that's all over me like waves that shake my shoulders — or is she shaking me and screaming, "Mr. Martin! Mr. Martin!

Wouldn't answer her if I could!

Well, it took me a while, but I'm almost as good as new. Just waiting to get all my strength back. Still a little tottery on my feet sometimes, but that's passing, too.

"Nothing wrong with you but Anno Domini," said Dr. Klannest today when he dropped by, he said, to check on me, but it was partly to snatch a breather. "If you had a stroke, you lucked out. No impairment anywhere — that wasn't there already."

"Anno Domini," I snorted back at him. "I'm only 73! You know my family! I'll live to see you underground."

"Don't doubt it," he said, getting up wearily, the planes of his face pulling down, deepening the lines. "Especially if I get yanked out of my office many more times to pick you up while I fight off hysterical females."

"That old biddie!" I said. Then I laughed. "Sure must have shook her up. Kicked the slats out of her schedule. She brings Jello on Fridays now. Or at least she did this Friday. Hoped maybe it'd cured her of Jello. Didn't."

"Well," Dr. Klannest got himself straightened up. "Good idea having someone interested enough to watch."

"She watches, all right" I snorted.

"Take care," said the doctor and he went off down the walk.

"You take care," I called after him. He worried me. He was working past his strength.

I looked at the lawn. Not too overgrown, yet. It hadn't been watered enough to grow much. I walked over to where my mower still stood. Those blasted ants were sweeping across the walk like a red tide. I'd almost finished this side lawn before all this happened. Well, it'd have to wait until I got back a little more poosh.

I trundled the mower into the

garage, squashing a few ants on the way. Then I got my weedburner out. *Every year,* I thought. *Every year I have to go through all this!* Not that it does a dang bit of good! But I do it anyway.

I lighted up the weedburner and went out, fire in my hand, to do battle with those blasted ants. *Funny,* I thought as I swept the flame across the walk, charring the ants into tight little balls, *All I can remember is thinking about the ants and then that old biddie was shrieking.* It was like going to sleep and waking again, knowing there must have been time between the two — and dreams.

And dreams. I went over the ant hills again, then turned the burner off. The blasted ants will take over if you let them. Dreams. There was something — did you ever catch hold of the shirttail of a dream and try to pull it back into your consciousness?

I stepped out on the walk, headed for the garage to put up the weedburner, smudging the charcoal fluffs under foot. Then one foot started scooting out from under me! I grabbed ground with the other, and danged if it didn't skid too! *Not again!* I thought. *I'm a Martin!* But a couple more half skids and I was on the grass, shaken, but standing.

Soon as I caught my breath, I hunkered down to look at the walk. I couldn't have skidded as much as half an inch or so with each foot. It was just the uncertainty of my footing that made it feel like half a yard. I wouldn't even have noticed if I'd been steadier on my feet to begin with.

I patted one of the charcoal spots with a fingertip. It plopped to nothing but a smudge. *I* am *getting old if something like that can throw me!* I patted another. Smudge. Another. It squirted away from the pressure of my finger, rolling in a sloppy eccentric sort of way!

Well! This was interesting! I reached over to where the black bit had landed, pressed my finger down on it tightly, then lifted it to take a closer look. It was like a misshappened, blackened B-B. My chest got tight. That shirttail hold I'd had on a dream suddenly billowed up over me and nearly stopped my breath.

I patted black spots until I had half a dozen of the little metallic blobs, thinking uselessly, *I didn't mean it — I didn't mean it!* with each one I lifted. I scooted their blackness off by pushing them across my palm. Then blinked at the dull shine of metal. Little metal blobs among the carbon fluffs —

I looked up — and around. Someone to show? Someone to scoff at my nonsense? Someone to explain this unmeant aggression to? Someone? (*to p. 138*)

STAR WARS

Readers who have been with me for the more than a few years that this column has been in existence will know that only twice before have I titled a column simply with the name of a film. Once was a review of *Zardoz*; the other was a non-account of *2001* when it appeared on TV (and then with an ironic decimal point in front of the 2).

And once more I have the impulse *not* to be clever, to simply give a wonderful work its due. This time it is the long awaited *Star Wars*.

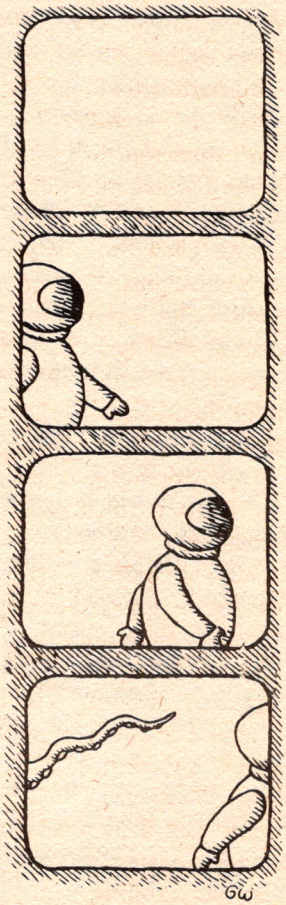
By the time this sees print, most of you will have seen it, either with pleasurable anticipation, or, as is too often true with science fiction fans, the desire to nit-pick, or bitch (to put it into contemporary parlance).

So the point of this essay is *not* to say "see it; you'll like it." But maybe I *can* point out some reasons why you did like it. (If you didn't like it, just stop right here.)

The reason this might be of value is that I have the sneaky hunch that some people might be uneasy at liking something so "mindless." We are not here given any overtones that might be interpreted as theological or philosophi-

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



cal as with *2001*. Or discernable "content" such as we expect from the best regarded s/f writers of the day, such as Le Guin or Delany.

Let me just throw out some varied thoughts on science fiction, science fiction films, and *Star Wars*. There might be some clues there.

A much heard expression is "the golden age of science fiction" (more or less meaning the 1940s). Some disillusioned science fiction person (could it have been Terry Carr?) said that "the golden age of science fiction is twelve." I do not take this as a totally pejorative remark. I can think of worse things to recapture than that wonderful and ongoing thrill of discovery *I* had at twelve when I found my first s/f magazine.

"Space opera" (i.e. that action adventure form of s/f that dominated the field in the early days of the magazines, typified by Doc Smith or even Heinlein without the didactics) has achieved a renaissance in the past decade, after being out of fashion during the '50s and early '60s, when social significance was the thing in science fiction.

This neo-romanticism, which is as close to true fantasy as it is to hard core s/f, certainly owes much to the craze for Tolkien in the mid-'60s, which demonstrated a hunger for glamour (in the medieval sense) or "magic" if you will in the readers of speculative fiction. This is not to say that in its new incarnation "space opera" can't have more to say than it did. Bradley's Darkover series is neo-romanticism at its best; it is a seamless combination of s/f and fantasy, and yet the two latest novels have had some important things to say without overloading their structure with "message."

Certainly one of the major needs being filled by this general type of fantasy and s/f is a return to simple moral values, without the ambiguities that have complicated life and literature. Good is good and bad is bad, and what a blessed relief to know which is which and to feel strongly about it.

Science fiction film has always been thematically about 20 years behind the written literature. *Forbidden Planet*, the best filmed space opera up 'til now, was a dandy story that would have stood out in a '30s magazine. More recent films, such as *Silent Running* and *Soylent Green* (*Silent Green* and *Soylent Running*?) have exhibited the social awareness of the written literature of the '50s. But George Lucas, the genius director/writer of *Star Wars*, seems to have narrowed the gap; he has correctly tuned in to those elements which have been drawing more and more people to fantasy and science fiction lately.

Certainly it is escapist; of the various genres of literature so labelled, s/f has been called "the thinking man's escape." But again, I refuse to be negative about the label. Most art is an effort to order and enhance matters to provide an alternative to the disorderly and grubby "real" world.

One of the major creative demands of fantasy and s/f is to literally create worlds — universes, futures, what have you — which the mainstream writer or filmmaker doesn't have to do. It is just there, in fact, that most of the creativity in the field has been expended.

George Lucas has here constructed a universe that seems not only to satisfy the science fiction reader, but the public at large, who, I would guess, are as sick of meaningful little movies as I am, and want something that is big, splashy, innocent, "mindless," and fun. As I write, the movie has been open less than a week in New York; I have seldom seen such a universally positive reaction to any film of any kind.

The mainstream critics have showed none of the obtuseness that I accused them of in my last column; I haven't seen one bad review. At The Science Fiction Shop, where I hang out, almost everyone (including a host of total strangers) enters with "Wasn't it wonderful?" and there's no need to ask what "it" is. Our favorite was the dear little old lady who stuck her head in and said "I loved every minute of it, especially that dumpy little vacuum cleaner!" (Madam, you are speaking of the robot I love!)

Star Wars is breaking box office and financial records for the film industry. The New York Times announces that film stocks are up, especially 20th Century's. It seems that most of the population of greater New York has seen the movie at least once; when I'm wearing my *Star Wars* T-shirt, every few blocks I am greeted with "May the force be with you" from total strangers (which worries me for reasons I'll go into later).

Do I hear a small voice from the back of the room asking "But what did *you* think of the movie?"

Well, after the screening at which I saw it for the first time, I found myself on the phone to many of my friends, burbling happily and sounding less like a dignified reviewer than like someone who has just won the lottery or fallen in love. (After the second screening, my friends were on the phone, burbling happily and sounding like *they'd* won the lottery or just fallen in love. Last Saturday a friend called from San Francisco, burbling happily and etc. At the Shop, we have come to recognize this as the burble syndrome.) (*to p. 149*)

A suspenseful and entertaining story about a group of allied soldiers during World War II who are given a four-week deadline to build an airfield in the jungle of West Africa. As you might expect, their solution to the problem is somewhat out of the ordinary.

The Man Who Could Provide Us With Elephants

by JOHN BRUNNER

"African elephants?" said Mr. Secrett. "Of course they can be tamed! Even those dead-end kids the Carthaginians knew how to do it. Surely you are not unaware" — he wriggled his ears and thereby slid his glasses down his nose so that he could look reproachfully over the top of them — "that Hannibal who crossed the Alps with elephants hailed from that continent? As a matter of fact I have personal experience of their tractability, albeit in a somewhat unorthodox context ...."

Pensively he rubbed his chin. All of a sudden his gaze was fixed on the long ago and far away.

I recognized the signs and joyously abandoned hope of getting any more work done today. In every writer's life there should be a librarian like Mr. Secrett, who presides over dim quiet corridors at the Royal Society for Applied Linguistics, a characteristically Victorian foundation dating back to the days when a knowledge of languages was sought less for its own sake than to promote the aims of empire and the ambition of Christian missionaries. The society's multilingual abridgments of the Gospel of Mark were long ago ceded to the SPCK, and it is over forty years since they last issued one of their Phrasebooks for the Colonial Service, of which the best remembered — thanks to a comedy show on BBC Radio Four — opens with the immortal sentence: "My name is (*here insert name*) but you must address me as 'Boss.'"

Frankly, it's a backwater. Nonetheless it serves a number of valuable purposes, not least among which is the fact that over the past decade it has furnished a haven for Mr. Secrett.

"There are people," he once said musingly to me, "who are destined for the *culs-de-sac* of

history — for, so to say, the vermiform appendices of time. I'm one; I'm sure of it. In consequence, this place suits me very well."

It is possible that among the fringe benefits may be the fact that on my numberous visits I have never actually seen him do any work. That is apparently the province of an unending succession of strange, tired-looking aides over whom he, as I said, presides. Some are elderly; some middle-aged; some may well be fresh from college. It makes no odds. The enclosed, dusty, stale atmosphere of the library seems invariably to communicate itself to them as soon as they arrive, and they bring queries to Mr. Secrett and depart with his orders in a kind of glum trance, while he occupies himself with his current interest: learning Amharic, as it might be, or correlating the Child Ballads with anthologies of Hindu folk tales. Sometimes, I confess, I do wonder how Mr. Secrett's employers feel about the arrangement ....

Luckily, however, I'm not among them. I just happen to have come into possession of a ticket for the RSAL library which is overstamped *Privileged Visitor*. Having read one of my books, a member of the society's council sent it to me in a transient fit of enthusiasm. I'm much obliged. Whenever I need to know about something really out of the ordinary, it's to Mr. Secrett that I turn.

The military mind (said Mr. Secrett) is nothing if not literal. Have we not all heard about the conscript campanologist who answered the sergeant-major's call for someone who knew about bell-ringing and was sent to mend the electric bell in the officers' mess?

You may be wondering what that has to do with elephants.

Well, had it not been for the aforesaid tendency to literalness, the army might have taken proper stock of my qualifications and during World War II would have assigned me to posts where I could deploy them to advantage. A young chap like me planning his career in transport catering .... Well, perhaps it did turn out for the best in the long run. At any rate, without being kicked into it, I'm sure I would never have discovered the aptitude for languages which over the years has given me enormous pleasure, and what did the kicking was some brass hat's automatic assumption that a recruit called Secrett must be hereditarily equipped for intelligence work. It's true that many bearers of the name derive it from a Norman-French word which translates as "discreet" or perhaps "trustworthy," but in my own case it's a corrupt re-spelling of the Scandinavian baptismal

name Sigrid. One of my ancestresses, so I'm told, was a defiantly unmarried mother.

Moreover it's possible that if I'd pursued the speciality I had in view I might have found myself prematurely redundant. I had set my heart on evolving cuisine for airships: flameless cookery that might safely take place within arm's reach of a bagful of hydrogen ....

Never mind. War intervened. That's how I came to be in a smelly, swampy, steamy, fever-ridden corner of West Africa at a juncture when all the boffins and backroom-boys — no doubt on the Axis side as well as ours — were desperately trotting out their weirdest notions in the hope that one or other of these harebrained schemes would enable them to steal a march on the enemy.

The project which led to my encounter with elephants had a more than averagely rational beginning. The North African campaign was under way, and the Germans were being forced back to the point where, so it was hoped, the chance would arise to invade Italy and thus eliminate their chief European ally.

What exercised the minds of the strategists was the problem of supplying adequate numbers of aircraft to the North African and Middle Eastern theaters of war. While Brazil did not in fact enter the war until later, there were influential groups there who preferred the British-American over the Nazi-Fascist cause, and were prepared, if not too much fuss were made, to allow the Allies the same kind of privileges on the islands of Fernando Noronha as the British had already secured from their "oldest ally" Portugal with regard to the Azores. To stage planes from the easternmost bulge of South America via West Africa *en route* to the actual fighting seemed, I imagine, like a reasonable counterpart of the Air Ferry Service already operating across the North Atlantic.

And so indeed it might have been but for the bureaucratic and brass-hatted habit of decreeing "it shall be so" after consulting maps rather than people who have been there. The atlases indicated that there was an optimum site to build an airstrip large enough to cope with the predicted influx of planes at an oh-so-precise map reference near the mouth of a tiny river running through territory where control was currently not being exercised by anybody in particular, though notionally we were on French-colonial soil and the applicable administration had declared for De Gaulle instead of Petain. So that was where they sent us.

"We," incidentally, were a Royal Pioneer Corps major by the name of Barney Wimswell, a Free

French officer called Raoul Fleaud, who had been sent along not because we were on what was supposed to be French territory but because he had been a civil engineer specializing in highway construction before the war, and about twenty other-ranks under the command of Company Sergeant-Major Corkran, a man whose stolid approach to life I shall never forget. My own role, as a newly commissioned lieutenant, was to liaise with the local inhabitants and enlist a labor force adequate to clear and level a runway and dig pits in lieu of sheds for fuel and spare parts. My facility for languages had not long before taken me agreeably by surprise, and the army had put me through a course of Arabic. The people of the area were reported as speaking it in addition to their own tongue because they had been converted to Islam sometime in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, and it was assumed that I would be able to communicate if Fleaud failed with French.

But from the moment of our arrival in this sweltering spot we were aware that what we had been ordered to do was absurd. None of the reference books consulted by those who dreamed up the scheme can have been reliable, or they would have mentioned that the area designated for the future airfield was part of a swamp forty miles by fifteen, covered by lush dank forest and luxuriant scrub, into which drained the watershed of a substantial range of hills. The said swamp was the breeding ground for a noxious variety of mosquito; the said mosquito was the vector of choice for malaria in the region; and, thanks to a smart bit of poaching by a general who didn't approve of us, the supply of mepacrine we should have had had been redirected to Burma for the Chindits.

And our deadline to build the airstrip was — four weeks.

We weren't even allowed to radio a complaint. We did of course have radios with us, but only so we could listen out at prescribed times for revised orders. The operation was supposed to be hush-hush, and we were forbidden to break radio silence unless actually attacked by Axis troops. Since the nearest such were heaven knows how far away, we had no alternative but to get on with the job and "show willing," even if willing was all we'd have to show in the long run.

So we buckled to, set up our camp, and got tarpaulins rigged over what was supposed to constitute the eventual runway — a kind of super-duckboard, flat pierced metal plates hinged so they could be wound on oversize cable-drums, which had, I think, been developed

to provide tanks with a safe approach to Bailey bridges over muddy riverbanks. And we spent our first evening grousing about the idiocy of generals.

The following day I went out with Fleaud, and along trails that barely existed, by the light of maps which hadn't been revised in fifty years, through a constant hail of revolting insects, we somehow found a way to the nearest village. We'd been told in our briefing before we set out that the *Service Propagandiste Francophone des Combattants d'Outremer* had had considerable impact in this area, using the Nazis' own newsreels of how they treated black prisoners of war, and that much at least was borne out in practice. Both the headman and the iman, who would correspond in our terms to the lord of the manor and the parson, were quite prepared to talk business with us.

Unfortunately our plan would call for at least two hundred and fifty, better still three hundred, able-bodied workers. From this village we stood a chance of recruiting perhaps twenty. It was the height of the fever season; everywhere we looked we saw people lying in the shade with chattering teeth and sweat streaming off them, and during our visit a child was taken to be buried. Fatalistically the imam advised us that it was the will of Allah that the epidemic should endure another month.

Still, we did manage to sign up those who were on their feet, and they duly reported next morning at dawn, and CSM Corkran set them to cutting trees along the proposed line of the runway. It wasn't felling the forest, though, that constituted our problem; it was dragging away the trucks so as to clear the remaining brush, then replacing them as a foundation for the rolls of metal plate we'd brought. To render the airstrip functional long enough even to fly in the fuel and spare parts which would precede the planes actually being ferried from Brazil would — so Fleaud calculated — require at least as many good thick tree trunks as grew in half a mile's radius. Back at HQ they had failed to allow for the boggy nature of the ground. We did, of course, have a caterpillar tractor with us; it had hauled the drums of "instant road" from the coast. Without help, however, its driver gloomily forecast that he could spend six months on this job, not one, and that was assuming his machine didn't sink into the swamp.

Apart from tree trunks there was literally nothing else in range which could provide the necessary support.

Micawberishly, nonetheless, we pushed ahead.

From the next village we visited we were able to hire only about a dozen fit workers. From the third, though, we engaged double that, and our spirits rose because there were still another four or five to call on within walking distance. There was no point in recruiting further afield; we had no facilities to feed the men and must rely on them going home every evening and returning at dawn.

At sundown that day we looked out on a discernible gap in the forest and toasted our achievement in the cognac which Fleaud had added to our kit — strictly for medicinal purposes. Despite the whine of the mosquitoes it seemed for a moment that we might achieve what we had set out to do.

Next morning, however, Major Wimswell had the shivers and a high temperatuare and was so giddy he could not stand up.

Corkran, one of those admirable "old sweats" who's seen it all before, wrapped him in every blanket that could be found — or equivalent thereof, since the blanket allotment in a tropical zone is minimal — gave him aspirins and set a private to keep watch and ply him with hot tea whenever he woke up. Fleaud argued that he should be treated with some *tisane*, which is his view was a certain cure for any fever; but when I lost patience and invited him to go and gather the necessary herbs, he seemed suddenly to recall that he wasn't in Provence and shut up.

That I think must have been the first sympton of his own bout of the disease. At any rate, when we trudged back from the next village on our list with the promise of only another six or seven fit men, he became delirious and collapsed. So did the man watching over Wimswell at about midnight. And I myself was feeling light-headed by then, and so I checked my temperature and found I was running a degree of fever. At least, though, I was functional ... or at any rate I persuaded myself I was.

Sometimes I suspect it's the way in which war forces people to exceed what they imagined to be the limits of their ingenuity or endurance which makes it fatally attractive even in an age of weapons that will destroy the spoils as well as the enemy. I knew perfectly well, and so did Wimswell and Fleaud in their lucid moments, and so above all did Corkran as he had to sign off a second man, a third, then half a dozen at a go, because they were incapable of standing up, that with the resources remaining it would be impossible to build the airstrip in the time allowed.

Yet we carried on anyhow in the vague expectation of a miracle. That happens all the time during a major war. What made this episode

different was that the miracle occurred.

Ironical, you know! There I was, a boy of twenty, overseas for only my second tour, and with one per cent of CSM Corkran's experience I was in charge of the whole operation, now that my two seniors had fallen sick. *De facto*, naturally, it was Corkran who held things together, but when with each passing day more of the workers failed to show up and those who did were half out of touch with reality, he started obsessively counting his pulse, and every hour on the hour he came to ask me for the unit thermometer, as though in the interim his temperature might have soared without his noticing.

Still, progress of a sort was made. I grew extremely proud of myself — not only because with the perseverance of Corkran and the other soldiers, when they weren't too ill, and of the native workers, the trees were visibly coming down, albeit at a slower rate than intended, but also because I was able to cope while fighting off the fever. Corkran was salted, as they say. I wasn't, but I still kept going.

Looking back, I presume I was suffering the same sort of illusion as a drunk who doesn't believe in his condition until a disaster proves it.

In my case, amazingly enough, what overtook me wasn't a disaster. It was the miracle I mentioned earlier.

That, though, didn't occur until about a week had elapsed.

A couple of days after Fleaud fell sick we were down to half our original number of workers, and I could gloomily foresee that tomorrow the total would be halved again. We in temperate climates are lucky to have few endemic diseases more severe than the common cold, which makes one miserable and grouchy enough, heaven knows, but seldom entrains immediate delirium. It was very difficult to sleep in our camp at that time. One or other of the invalids was sure to cry out in the night, thanks to some terrifying bad dream. Fleaud's took him back to the time he had spent in a seminary — his parents intended him for the priesthood — where he was being tormented over again by a choirmaster who refused to believe in people being tone-deaf. His attempts to sing Gregorian chants at the top of his voice were sufficient to give music a bad name for all time.

It looked, under the circumstances, as though the most constructive course for me was to tour the nearby villages thus far unvisited. Even a few extra workers might yet — so I dared to imagine in my confused condition — tip the bal-

ance in favor of our project.

Leaving Corkran in command, I set off with the man who could most easily be spared, a Signals corporal named Smithers, whose duty of listening out at prescribed times for messages from HQ could be handled by anyone not actually delirious. Moreover he had unwisely admitted to having been a Boy Scout and learned to read a map and use a compass, which made him ideal for the job.

At each of the remaining villages we encountered what by then I had recognized as the standard situation for this entire region. I say villages, but in fact some were towns with a thriving trade, even during the war, in imported manufactured goods as well as local produce. At one time there had been a Portuguese fort near the mouth of the river — in ruins now and covered with greenery — where slave dealers exchanged their captives for European luxuries. I had small difficulty visualizing the various headmen, imams and other dignitaries we met in the same sort of role. They constituted a Moslem ruling class lording it over a peasantry who adhered, even after centuries, to the old pagan beliefs. The upper crust did understand Arabic, as I'd been advised in my briefing; when addressed in that language, however, the majority of the population turned out to know only the kind of phrases which might correspond to orders given by a chief and fawning compliments paid him by dependents. It was much as though their knowledge, in English terms, had been limited to remarks like: "Come! Go! Do as you're told!" — plus a few garnishes like: "Lord bless 'ee, squoire, 'tes a gradely day the noo, begorrah, gorblimey, ain't it?"

Accompanied by a tug of the forelock, I suspect ....

Well, if these people were to do the actual work for us, we were going to have to figure out a way of talking to each other. Their language belongs to the Mandingo group — as I found out much later — so it's fiedishly difficult for someone who thinks in Indo-European terms, but, between us, I and a few of the natives who were healthy enough cobbled together a workable pidgin. I mention this because at one point I started to wonder whether the lazy, parasitical headmen and their families of spongers were lying to us in order to prevent us from taking away workers whose produce they depended on for survival, but it turned out that the fever really was as severe and as long-lasting as claimed, for the working people — the common farmers and their wives — confirmed it.

Besides, funnily enough, under primitive conditions one doesn't

need to work nearly such long hours, nor so much of the year, to earn a subsistence as in our so-called civilized society. Ever since I found that out, I've been wondering in what respect, if any, we're superior ....

Undumi was the furthest village we had yet visited, and by the time we had finished our negotiations, the afternoon was wearing away. The headman, whose name was Dafoud, and his brother Yosein, who also happened to be the imam — yet another squire-and-parson set-up — suggested we spend the night; they could put a spare hut at our disposal. Thinking that this was the likeliest way to be laid low by fever, I was about to decline, but the savory smell of a goat-meat stew persuaded me otherwise. Put it down, I thought giddily, to good public relations.

Smithers was notably unenthusiastic. But he was what later came to be graphically called "square," while I regarded it as a bit of an adventure.

Now at long last we come to my miracle.

Smithers and I had just retired for the night, and were trying to make our unaccustomed bones comfortable on a pair of extremely basic straw pallets, when there was a soft call from outside. I recognized a couple of the words. Someone was asking permission to enter.

With a sigh I invited him to do so.

There appeared in the doorway, by the light of the foul-smelling and flaring palm-oil lamp which one of the chief's wives had lent us, a wizened man lacking his upper front teeth and so scrawny a good gust of wind might blow him away. He wore the usual loincloth of the lower class, plus a couple of necklaces, and carried a stick which he obviously had frequent need of to help him along.

He announced himself as Edusu son of Obe son of Obe, waited a moment as though half hoping we might find the information impressive, then bowed and sat cross-legged on the ground between our pallets.

"I know how you can build your airfield," he said.

Put that way it sounds simple, but actually it must have taken half an hour to reach that point in our discussion, supplementing words with sketches on the sandy floor of the hut; the old man's stick served for a stylus.

And when Edusu finally got his point over I almost — luckily not quite, for he would have taken grave offense — *almost* burst out laughing. Somehow I limited myself to the one burning question: "How?"

By way of answer he scuffed

over what he had already scratched into the floor and substituted the picture of an elephant.

My fever must have been approaching its peak, for although my head felt clear, what passed for logic in it bore small resemblance to what I like to think of as my normal common sense. At once my mind was abuzz with visions. I didn't waste time worrying about the supposed impossibility of training African elephants; it was several days later, from Wimswell, that I first heard that particular old-wives' tale. But I had seen documentary films featuring elephants, and from some article I'd read by chance I knew that an adult elephant can move logs weighing a couple of tons. They also weigh a considerable amount themselves. I pictured them dragging the trees we had felled clear of the line of the runway so we could dispose of the underbrush, then not only hauling them back and laying them tidily side by side to serve as foundation for our "instant road" but also acting as four-legged steamrollers, compacting and leveling the surface to a standard even our hoped-for gang of three hundred men could never match.

I said, "How soon? How many? How much?"

To the first question he replied, "Not tomorrow. One day after tomorrow."

To the second: "Perhaps twenty. Maybe thirty."

To the third ....

He rose, smiling crookedly. In the dim light he took on a pose of amazing dignity; he looked for a second as though he, not Dafoud, should be the headman here.

"Nothing," he said. "It will cost nothing. There is a reason why I am glad to give it to you."

And, almost as though he had left by some other route than walking out the door, he disappeared.

Smithers had missed a lot of this, and so I had to explain. He was dubious ... but then, he was unimpressed by any of what Africa had to offer. Over supper he had made insulting comparisons between the dish of goat we'd been given and a Lancashire hotpot. Still, at heart he was as keen as anybody to see the job through, and if this was the only way it could be done, it would be the way we did it.

Agreed on that, we went to sleep.

During the night I dreamed with extraordinary vividness, as one often does while running a temperature, with the result that in the morning I was not wholly certain the conversation had actually taken place. The surreptitious approach Edusu had made, instead of speaking up when the villagers assembled to find out what we white strangers

wanted here, suggested it might not be politic to tell Defoud and Yosein that he had talked to us. Everybody turned out again to watch us leave, but "everybody" did not include Edusu. So ....

You know, I must have been really very ill indeed, even though I was walking about normally enough, and I hadn't lost my appetite either. For it had not occurred to me to ask Smithers whether he remembered what I remembered, before he passed some casual comment on the way back to camp concerning the old man with missing teeth.

That promptly replaced my fear that the episode had been a hallucination with an even worse possibility: that Wimswell and Fleaud might not approve of what I'd committed us to.

I regarded it as a blessing that when we got back both of them were still too unwell to discuss anything. That left Corkran, whose stolidity — as I believe I already mentioned — still amazes me after all these years. When I said that if some elephants turned up they would be tame ones coming to help with the work, so no one should take fright and above all the sentries must be warned not to loose off guns at them, he just noted the information and said, "Very good, sir. Is that all for the moment?"

The following morning I was, I think, over the worst of my fever; I'd been lucky to contract a mild variety, lasting four or five days instead of ten. I rose in trepidation, half expecting that when I pushed back my tent flap I'd find myself nose to knee with some intrusive pachyderm. But there was no sign of the elephants after all.

What there was sign of was a return of those of our labor force who had fallen ill after the first day. Having partly recovered, they dragged themselves back to the site by sheer willpower. By the time I got out to the airstrip, Corkran was chortling with satisfaction. It was the first time we had mustered a hundred workers — a poor showing compared to what was expected of us, but there it was. And tomorrow, with luck, might be better yet.

With so many men at work we had to divide them into gangs. Having no more informed basis on which to select foremen, I singled out those who arrived wearing dashikis, that is robes, rather than just a breechclout. The choice proved to be in accordance with what the local people regarded as the natural order of things. The foremen picked by this arbitrary system were without exception from the dominant Moslem group. They were not, of course, themselves headmen or imams or any kind of bigwig; persons of such exalted

rank would never condenscend actually to *work*. But they were all nephews or cousins of the nobility. The rest were likewise Moslem in theory, but pagan in practice. Many of them brought along small animals — a newborn kid, or a chicken — and made sacrifice on their first day at work to ensure good luck.

Sensibly enough, the offerings were singed over campfires afterwards and made to double as lunch ....

By midmorning I'd about given up on the idea of elephants, especially since on reflection it struck me as very odd that apart from Edusu no one at any of the by now numerous villages we had visited had broached this possibility. If such a generous supply of the beasts — had he not promised twenty, perhaps thirty? — existed within a relatively short distance, would someone else not have mentioned it before?

Moreover: what were they ordinarily used for? Supposedly there were not even any substantial logging operations in this region, and given the backward nature of the local culture, that was the only sort of undertaking I could think of which would call for such vast reserves of muscle power.

When I joined Corkran in the HQ tent for a mug of tea at 1030 hours, and he brought up the subject in a joking manner, I regret to say I was quite short with him.

I regret it all the more because I had scarcely finished speaking before there was a commotion outside. We both dived for the exit. With relflex politeness Corkran let me go first. Outside we saw —

Let me paint it for you, as it were. You are to imagine the tropical sky above hills fledged with dense dark greenery just visible over a nearer zone of mingled trees and underbrush. There is a military camp, a dozen khaki tents, and there are a few intrusions of modern technology such as the tractor and the huge cable-drums under tarpaulins. To the east of the camp trees have been felled for a distance of some hundred-odd yards, making a sort of furrow in the forest. Working to extend the cleared zone are seventy men in loincloths, glistening like ripe damsons from perspiration, under the direction of our own few fit personnel plus half a dozen local foremen wearing dashikis in sundry of the colors Manchester could furnish cheap.

And the workers have suddenly found the grey wrinkled heads of twenty-four elephants staring at them from between the unfelled trees. No wonder they cried out!

But that was as nothing to the shriek which greeted Edusu when he appeared.

For a long moment I didn't recognize him, only deduced that this must be he because it couldn't be anybody else. His scrawny frame, nude apart from a breechclout, wristlets and anklets all of braided elephant-hide, was painted white, red and green in patterns which were repeated on a shield which he held in his left hand, while in his right he carried a scepter. I call it that because it was a symbol of superiority and dominance, as I discovered later, but it was unlike anything we think of as royal. It was, to be precise, an elephant's trunk carefully dried and supported on a stalk of bamboo in the posture of rogue elephant adopts when he gets set to charge.

At the mere sight of it, all our foremen ran like hell. Some of them tripped over their robes ....

But the reaction of the rank-and-file workers was totally different. They ran towards Edusu and dropped on their knees, arms upraised, without exception grinning as though they were trying to split their heads in half. As the elephants passed them, they shouted with excitement and incredulity; then they rose to their feet again and followed in Edusu's wake as he headed steadily for where I was standing.

"What the hell is going on?" Corkran whispered, and added automatically, "Sir!"

I couldn't answer. I was staring at the elephants with as much amazement and disbelief as anyone. I can't in all honesty claim that I recognized what was odd about those beasts right away. I did, however, think they moved uncommonly slowly; I did notice that unless they received a command from Edusu they simply stood — they didn't even flap their ears at flies, of which there were thousands in the hot dank air. But under the circumstances what I took for granted was that they were impressively well trained.

My state of confusion, as much as the demands of courtesy, made me stay put until Edusu halted before me, lowered his scepter's butt to the ground, whereupon it became a staff for him to lean on, and said, "Lieutenant Secrett, here are the elephants I promised which will build your airfield."

Finding my tongue again, I was able to reply, "It is well. Go to it." And, turning to Corkran: "Sar'n-major! Kindly show Mr. Edusu the plans for the runway."

At hearing this naked painted African called "mister" Corkran blenched; however, he recovered his composure, and we spent the next half hour explaining what had to be done. Edusu, as I'd observed during our meeting at Undumi, was incredibly quick on the uptake. Within minutes he grasped the

crucial point that the runway had to be very hard and very strong because once an airplane stopped flying the air no longer held it up and it regained its normal weight, which might be several elephants'-worth.

"It will be done well!" he assured us, and went to — well, to brief his team. I don't know how else to describe what he did. He called his elephants into a circle and walked from one to the next, giving each what sounded like quite complex verbal instructions amplified with gestures, while both whites and blacks watched with fascination.

Then the elephants proceeded to do precisely as they had been told.

Even for the stolid Corkran it must have been a disturbing spectacle. For the other soldiers it was wholly incomprehensible. For the native workers — why, they were overcome with delight! Some tried to rush at Edusu and kiss his feet; he had to threaten them with swipes of his scepter.

That was how the *real* work of building our airstrip began.

An hour or so before sundown Edusu came back to me, to explain that his elephants would not work after dark and he must now allow them to eat and drink and get a night's rest. This was of a piece with what's I'd heard concerning Indian elephants — during the day I'd thought back and remembered scores of references not only in factual works but in novels and adventure stories I'd read as a child — so I gave him leave to depart with my warmest thanks and compliments.

Even this first incursion by our new helpers had seen a transformation of our work site. Twice as many trees had come down, and they had been hauled out of the way and neatly piled. Now the men could get on with the sort of light work which really was all we ought to ask of them in their debilitated condition, clearing scrub with sickles and hatchets and burying it because it was far too damp to catch fire — though what we could burn, we did.

The one thing I was most unhappy about was Edusu's frailty. In daylight he looked much older and more ill than he had seemed by the flickering oil lamp that shone on our first encounter. His garish body-paint and his proud posture helped to disguise the face, but his hoarse and quavery voice betrayed him, while he had to lean on his scepter again for support while talking to me. A lifetime's infection and reinfection with malaria had taken its inevitable toll.

I suggested that one of the younger men might be detailed to accompany him, but he refused all offers of assistance and set off with

his elephants the way they had come this morning. Slowly. They walked not as though they too were weak — they had spent the day proving how strong they were — but as though they had no interest in the chore of putting this foot ahead and then that. As though, were they not under orders from this skinny old man, they would have been content to stop in their tracks and never move again.

But for the time being I could not allow myself to worry about such matters.

Duly the elephants returned, not sharp at sunrise when the work began but about an hour later, and once more they toiled without a break or any direction except Edusu's word-of-mouth instructions until late afternoon, and departed. Progress was amazing. At this rate, despite our many setbacks, there was now a chance we might finish the runway within the time allotted. It had occurred to me to ask Edusu whether his elephants would be strong enough to unroll our drums of "instant road," and I was prepared to believe his assurance that they were. So even if our caterpillar tractor broke down, we could hope to carry on.

That evening I was able to give Wimswell the good news. He remained weak, but he could sit up and his head was tolerably clear. When I explained about the elephants, however, I feared he was about to suffer a relapse, for long seconds dragged by while he simply gazed at me with his mouth ajar.

Finally he managed to frame in words what was on his mind.

"Elephants?" he exploded. "Here in Africa? Secrett, you're insane! It's only Indian elephants that can be trained to useful work!"

Which was, as I believe I already mentioned, the first time I'd heard that particular fable.

"But it's true!" I objected, and turned to Corkran, who had come with me into Wimswell's tent.

"God's truth, sir," Corkran confirmed. "We've just done more in one day than we did in six without their help."

Wimswell slumped back on his bed.

"I'm still too limp to argue," he muttered. "But I swear I shan't believe it till I see it."

The following morning he managed to get to his feet, shave, put on uniform and stagger from his tent to watch the arrival of Edusu. Into the bargain, Fleaud decided he also was well enough to up and about; he obviously wasn't, since his teeth kept starting to chatter the moment his attention was distracted and he was very pale and his hands trembled, but there was no reasoning with him and he emerged in pajamas to join us.

Faced with the incontrovertible presence of the elephants, Wimswell did no more than shake his head and order me to introduce Edusu to him as soon as possible. Fleaud, on the other hand, reacted with near-violence.

"It is not possible!" he shouted. "I must still be in a fever dream! *Those* are not elephants — not elephants at all!"

Reminded of the episode of the *tisane*, Corkran and I attempted to humor him, thinking this a delusion due to imagining that he was back in his beloved France. He was insistent, though, and I finally lost patience.

"Damn it, man! They have trunks in front and tails behind and a leg at each corner, don't they? So what the hell else should they be called but elephants?"

"You are doubting my word, you are calling me a liar!" Fleaud raged, and proceeded to recite what I think he intended for a list of his qualifications in this matter. It amounted to a miscellany of incoherent scraps, but from them I did piece together what he was driving at. Thanks to the chance discovery of a cache of fossil bones in a clay deposit which he had cut into while working on a new road between Biarritz and the Spanish frontier, he had started to take more than the average layman's interest in extinct animals and made a bit of a hobby of visiting museums and zoos to draw comparative anatomical sketches. Astonishing what strange bedfellows are thrown together by a war, isn't it? Which may also be a factor contributing to our taste for it even in the nuclear age .... Excuse me, I'll try not to digress again.

I omitted to mention, incidentally, that Fleaud had shifted to French by this point, his fever having temporarily deprived him of his normally adequate if not outstanding command of English, with the result that Corkran and Wimswell — neither of whom spoke French beyond the please-and-thank-you level — were, to put it mildly, confused. I myself was having difficulty following Fleaud as he ranted on about the set of the ears and the articulation of the knee joints and ....

And there was a sharp report.

A gunshot.

We all rounded the HQ tent, which blocked our view of the direction from which the noise had come. Staggering towards us, clutching his belly and bleeding, was one of the sentries whom, thanks to a remainder from Corkran, I'd kept posted along the paths leading to our site. This was correct procedure, but, candidly, after the generally welcoming reaction we'd had at all the neighboring villages, I'd never expected them to need the

weapons which they drew from store by turns before going on watch. Perhaps this attitude had communicated itself to the unfortunate man who sank to the ground and died before our eyes; perhaps it was the sight of people he recognized which made him lower his guard, or perhaps it was the children, who could not possibly be a threat.

I don't know.

But approaching us was a group of men in dashikis, among whom I recognized Dafoud, and Yosein, and the foremen who had fled when the elephants arrived. They were herding along with guns, which by the look of them had been obsolete a century ago but whose enduring deadliness had just been demonstrated, a group of women and children. Some of the latter were too young to walk and their mothers were carrying them.

Edusu issued a curt command to his elephants. They stopped what they were doing and turned to face the newcomers. The workers likewise broke off and fell to whispering among themselves. I remember clearly how bright their eyeball whites were in their dismayed faces.

Our other sentries were out of sight of the camp. While there was a slim chance that hearing the shot they would respond by coming circumspectly back and investigating before they showed themselves, it would be terribly risky to try and alert them. And the danger stemming from delirium had led me to ordain that weapons not be worn inside our perimeter.

It was not a time for positive action. Wimswell underlined the point by keeling over. As for Fleaud, he must still have been equally sick. He paid scarcely any attention to the intruders but went on muttering comments about the elephants and how impossible it was for them to be real.

I called orders to our men to stand still and make no gestures that might be misinterpreted. Seeing one of their comrades shot down had put them into an ugly mood, but there were at least a score of guns trained not only on us but on the women and children.

Wimswell moaned and tried to rise. In a stage whisper I pleaded with him to stay put; some of those armed men looked dreadfully trigger-happy.

Dafoud advanced ahead of his companions and cupped his hands around his mouth of shout at Edusu in Arabic — to my surprise, for I had been under the impression that the old man didn't speak it.

"Take the elephants back where they came from!" Dafoud cried. "We shall kill the women and children if you refuse!"

Edusu looked sadly at the party of hostages. He answered at once,

also in Arabic and with an accent better than mine: "I swear you will never set eyes on my elephants after today!"

He concluded by bowing his head in submission. Then, with his stiff measured gait, he approached me.

"Lieutenant Secrett, *they*" — a tilt of his head towards Dafoud and Yosein — "will not allow your airfield to be built."

"Why not?" I forced out.

"They believe that anybody who can command an elephant is a servant of Shaitan." Edusu was speaking Arabic to me too now and was able to make himself far clearer than in the crude pidgin we'd used previously. "Those women and children whom you see: they are the wives of my son, who stands next to Dafoud in the blue dashiki, and my grandchildren."

"Your son is — is with *them*?" I said incredulously.

Edusu sighed. "Oh, he betrayed me long ago. Now he accepts with the rest of them that my knowledge is accursed, and he has always declined to let me teach him what I know. I welcomed the chance to help with your work here, for it was the only opportunity I have ever had to convert theory into practice .... Well, I have done what I could. Now I must give my elephants one last command."

Shoulders slumped, he turned away. So convincing was his posture of resignation and defeat, the men around us lowered their guns. Dafoud and Yosein laughed aloud and clapped one another on the shoulder, excited by the easy victory. Edusu uttered his "last command."

The elephants charged.

One second earlier it had occurred to me to wonder how, if this truly were the first chance Edusu had had to try out his "theory," he had mustered two dozen full-grown elephants that responded perfectly to even very complicated instructions. My train of thought was spectacularly derailed at once.

Dafoud's men, of course, fired. Several of them scored direct hits. One elephant was struck in the right foreleg, about level with the knee. It should have been sent sprawling. Instead, it kept on coming. So did the one shot in the mouth, supposedly a sure kill; I literally saw the hole the bullet made under the furiously upraised trunk and between the parted jaws. And there was another shot from the side, a cow. Maybe more were hit. I didn't see.

But from none of the bullet holes I did see was there any blood ....

The one that had sighted on Dafoud caught him up by the left leg. For a heartrending instant he

was heard to scream. Then he was *cracked* like a whip. And thrown away.

His brother the imam was trampled into an anonymous smear.

The rest dropped their useless guns and fled. But Edusu, beaming, standing straighter than I had ever seen him, waved his scepter and called new instructions; and before they had the chance to gain the cover of the forest, the rest of Dafoud's gang were, so to say, under arrest: carried back in the most undignified and ridiculous postures by the elephants who had seized them by what came handy — arm, leg, or robe.

This done, the great beasts stood, as ever, utterly still.

I recovered enough to instruct Corkran to collect the guns and break out our own so that the survivors could be put under guard. While this was being done, I mutely asked of Edusu: was this the takeover it looked like?

Understanding me perfectly, he simply smiled and indicated the native workers, who were closing on us like a tide of joy incarnate. They hoisted Edusu on their shoulders and set off in a crazy processional dance all round the site.

While they were boiling off their high spirits, which conclusively demonstrated that they didn't in the least mind losing their headman and their imam, I took another look at the elephants.

There weren't any bullet holes in them. Not in the leg, not in the flank, not anywhere.

Had I been dreaming? Deluded, like poor Fleaud? Oh, surely I must have been! My feverish imagination must have supplied the vision of those bullets striking home, and in actual fact all the shots must have flown wide — small wonder, come to think of it, if a moment before the elephants' charge the men holding the guns had relaxed and lowered their guard ....

And here came Edusu again, still on the shoulders of his — literally! — supporters, commanding them to lower him to the ground.

"Lieutenant Secrett," he said formally, "I'm afraid you will get no more work done today. There is a reason for celebration. Dafoud's evil reign is over. But tommorrow I will instruct these who are now my people to report for work, and I will lead my elephants to you again. On one condition."

Fleaud, as though overcome by the suddenness of events, was sitting on the ground now and stared into nowhere, his teeth once more chattering. Some of the soldiers were so nauseated by the revolting sight of what had happened to Yosein that they had had to go aside and vomit; Smithers was one

of them. Wimswell, however, was sufficiently recovered to stand up with a tent guy for support and now demanded to know what Edusu was saying. I translated.

"Promise him anything — promise him the moon!" the major ordered. "Without his help we shan't stand a hope in hell of finishing the job."

And he appended after fractional hesitation, "Besides, he may have just saved our lives ...."

The words made me shiver. Swallowing hard, I asked Edusu what the condition was.

"You will make my son work alongside everybody else until his soft hands are blistered and his soft belly grows lean!" the old man snapped.

"It shall be done," I assured him, half relieved to find it so simple, half appalled at the venom in his voice. Still, if his son really had betrayed him .... I added one further question:

"Edusu, why did you not speak Arabic with me before? It would have been much easier."

His lined old face clouded, and his eyes looked through and past me into some other age.

"There are grounds for me to dislike those who brought the Arab speech here," he said eventually — and all of a sudden he was surrounded again by yelling, waving men determined to carry him off. He barely had time to give orders for his elephants to fall in behind before he was swept away, back to Undumi. His daughters-in-law and grandchildren rather sheepishly joined the crowd, and within another couple of minutes we white strangers were along with our captives.

We improvised, more than organized, a funeral for the unlucky sentry. So that everybody could attend, Corkran proposed roping together Dafoud's men, Edusu's son included. Wimswell approved the idea and ordered in addition that they should be given nothing, not even water, until the start of work tomorrow morning when Edusu and the workers returned. None of us doubted the old man's assurance on that score. It was plain that he was regarded as the rightful headman of Undumi. We had accidentally got mixed up in a miniature coup d'etat. Fortunately the ruler being deposed was apparently himself a usurper.

That apart, the rest of the day's events had wished on me a string of insoluble riddles. Where had Edusu conjured up his elephants? How long had it been since he was deposed from the headship of Undumi, or had he never enjoyed it, merely fallen heir to the role from which some ancester had been dislodged?

And what about those bullet holes I'd seen? And then not seen?

Wimswell, luckily, was capable of resuming command, for the time being at any rate. So I asked his permission to go and see how Fleaud was getting on. One of the soldiers had helped him back to his tent, where I found him shivering as badly as before, but clear-headed and once more able to speak English.

Propped up by a duffel bag on the end of his camp bed in lieu of a pillow, he greeted my appearance at the tent door with a cry.

"I don't care what you say — those are not elephants!"

Pretending agreement, I sat down on a handy crate. "What are they, then?" I inquired.

"I don't know." He shook his head lugubriously. "Maybe a species unknown to science. *Ex Africa semper aliquid novi.*"

"What?"

I blush to admit it, but it was only later that I acquired a working knowledge of Latin. Perhaps it was Fleaud's scorn which decided me that I must do so ....

"Out of Africa always something new!" he barked in annoyance. And went on: "Oh, even a fool could see they're built wrong, surely! The ears, the legs with the knees articulating much too high, the trunk too short, the slope of the back too acute, the tusks as well wrong as can be, the lot of them!"

"Mr. Secrett," Corkran said reprovingly, entering the tent with a mug of water, "you know you shouldn't tire Mr. Flay-oh out."

"Quite right," I muttered, and rose to go.

"Find out what they are!" Fleaud called after me.

"I'll ask Edusu tomorrow morning," I assured him and went back to help Wimswell sort out all the officially required minutiae which, while I was involuntarily in command, had been neglected. This exhausted the poor fellow. By sundown I was left alone with my private puzzlement, and in the end I went to sleep — fitfully, dreaming of weird metallic creatures spawned of a cross between Hannibal's elephants and the clumsy tanks of World War I, which would be the ultimately unstoppable vehicle for use in war because no matter how often they were shot they would never die.

Next day only a very small number of workmen turned up, contrary to what I had understood Edusu to promise. I stress that: what I had understood, not what he had actually said. So complete had been the popular acceptance of him as a better headman than Dafoud, I'd clean forgotten that he could only pledge the allegiance of the men from Undumi. And those were

the ones who did arrive, hung over and miserable but sharp on schedule.

From them I found out, at Wimswell's insistence, that the men from the other villages were probably busy with local insurrections. The death of Dafoud and Yosein, according to what they told us, had proved a signal example for the rest of the downtrodden workers. That phrase sprang automatically to my mind; I'd seen how well it matched the circumstances.

"Oh, no!" Wimswell groaned when I interpreted the news. "You mean we now have to wait until they've killed off their respective village overlords before we can carry on with the job?"

"It sounds like it," I admitted. "But" — trying to look on the bright side — "there are always the elephants."

"I suppose so," he said grudgingly. "We'll have to make the best of it."

Not unnaturally, I was more desperate than he to see those great grey beasts come back. Seemingly I was the only person who had noticed — imagined — those bloodless bullet holes. So vivid was the image in memory, however, I wanted with a sort of eager thirst to satisfy myself, in the here and now, that the creatures' hides lacked the scars I had (must have!) invented ....

They didn't come. The usual time, an hour after sunrise, passed; another hour slipped away, and a third.

"Elephants?" Wimswell barked at me, passing on his first proper tour of inspection of the camp site since his illness. "Hah! Looks as though we've served the fellow's turn, doesn't it? I'll bet he's reclining in the lap of luxury now he's won back his post as headman!"

Corkran, at the major's side, glowered as though he were in complete agreement. Yet I couldn't reconcile my knowledge of Edusu with this cynical conclusion.

Boldly I countered: "Sir, Edusu is old and frail, isn't he? Suppose something's happened to him! I think I'd better go and see."

Wimswell regarded me under lowered brows. Did I mention he had a splendid pair, like miniature boot-brushes?

"Think you can follow the trail?" he said after a moment.

"If it's the trail of twenty-four elephants, yes," I said. "It'll be easier than finding Undumi by map and compass!"

"Very well. Take the man you went with before, then — Corporal Smithers. And be back before nightfall absolutely without fail. Understood? *Without fail.*"

"Yes, sir," I said, and for the first time since our arrival threw him up he sort of salute they teach

at an Officer Cadet Training Unit.

While Smithers, grousing as always, and I were getting our kit together, Fleaud emerged from his tent again, still weak but marginally improving.

"Good luck!" he said, clapping my shoulder. "Your mission will be of great interest to science. If you can, bring back bones and at least a sample of the hide."

"I'm damned," I muttered, "if I'm going to carry one of the brutes. I'd much rather come back with it carrying me."

"Oh, I'm afraid that is out of the question," Fleaud said offhandedly, as though the events of the past few days had entirely escaped him. "Elephants on this continent cannot be trained like those in India."

I stared at him for a long moment. But it didn't seem worth invoking the evidence of his own eyes. Not if he had already dismissed it as unreliable.

As a result of that exchange, when we set off I was in as bad a state as Smithers. I learned within half an hour that he and those of his mates who had been sufficiently affected to vomit when Yosein was squashed to pulp had been nicknamed "The Lilylivers." So he had accepted this assignment to escape pro tem from his so-called comrades. It seemed unfair to burden someone in that sort of mess with my own extra problem. I did, though, wish I had someone with whom I could debate the origin and nature of those elephants! Having been told by both Wimswell and now Fleaud too that they weren't credible, I was starting to believe they were all part of a complex illusion or hallucination, and that I would shortly wake at home to find nurses and doctors in attendance.

The nature of the trail which we picked up at once and had no trouble following was far from reassuring. I have a memory like a flypaper, and — as I believe I said already — I had spent a long time thinking back over what chance information I'd gleaned about elephants during childhood. I felt satisfied that I was correct in looking for branches torn from trees, either so that the elephants going by could eat the juicy leaves or simply because they needed a fly swatter. There was no lack of flies, I promise you.

What we actually found was more like the sort of path — one might say swath — which could have been created by a giant counterpart of our caterpillar tractor, as though the animals had unthinkingly obeyed the order, "Go that way!" Even some quite large trees had been pushed over rather than detoured around. The route did have a couple kinks in it, but they gave the impression of having

been caused less by obstructions than by the coming into sight of landmarks — a distinctive peak in the nearby hills, a bend in a stream caused by a durable stratum of rock.

Going slowly because with each passing yard it seemed sillier to have set out in quest of such brutes without an antitank gun, we nonetheless located Edusu and his secret within less than the hour I'd automatically assumed the trip would take. I had failed to allow for his elderly need to pause often and mete out every pace.

We emerged suddenly into a clearing, and there he was, fully arrayed in his regalia, scepter, shield and all, on an outcrop of grey stone weathered to form a sort of natural throne. And beyond his still form ....

Was this how legends began about an elephant's graveyard?

There was a rock wall, crumbling away. From the exposed face protruded not what might reasonably have been expected, the bones and teeth of animals long dead, but something else. Something I wanted not to believe in.

Frozen still, part in and part out of the rock wall, were the forequarters of twenty-four elephant *half*-clad in *half*-skin and *half*-muscle ... like clotted mist. They no more moved than plaster models might. Yet unmistakably these were the same creatures I had watched as they hauled away great sluggish logs and built them into tidy stacks.

I was dazed.

Smither's reaction was more voilent. He uttered a cry and raised his gun, making to fire. At least that served to convince me he could see what I was seeing.

"Don't shoot!" I cried. "Bullets won't hurt them!"

"I know," he muttered, lowering his gun. "I saw. Yesterday."

"You too?" I rounded on him.

"Yes, sir." He gulped. "The bullets went right in and out the other side. Just as if there wasn't anything to stop them!"

Out the other side .... Oh, I was glad not to have noticed that!

Before I could say anything else, Edusu stirred, roused by our voices. His sharp bright eyes opened and fixed on us.

"I left it too late," he said in a faint wheeze. "I am tired, friend Secrett. I am old. The strain of yesterday did not leave me the strength to bring my servants back to you today."

I didn't know where to look — at him, who suddenly terrified me, or at the elephants, which constituted the reason for my terror.

"I think," he went on after a pause, "that I am dying. I do not want my knowledge to be lost. I wanted to pass it to my son, as it was passed to me by Obe son of

Obe and to him by Obe son of Dusi and to him by Dusi son of Dola ... but my son took the usurpers' side. Friend and brother, listen to me who am weary and about to die. I have a story to unfold. And if you wish you shall be the one to complete the work we have begun together."

The story was a long one. Before it was half finished I had to send Smithers — who hadn't understood a word, of course — back to camp on his own, to let Wimswell know that we weren't dead from an ambush or being trampled by elephants or whatever. I made him leave his remaining rations and half his canteen of water to sustain Edusu. And went on listening. It had never occurred to me that a tale passed by word-of-mouth could survive in such detailed form through almost four centuries. Some passages were so very detailed, I found my attention wandering as it used to on Sunday mornings when I was a child obliged to attend chapel and the minister — who insisted on reading the whole Bible to his flock once per year — had arrived at a chapter of First Chronicles or suchlike comprising an interminable succession of "begat."

But I retained, and to this day still do, the essentials of what Edusu recited to me.

Why did he and his people so detest the Moslem upper class who had taken charge of all the villages in the region?

Because they were the direct successors of the slave dealers who had moved in when the arrival of European traders created a demand. That Portuguese fort which I already referred to was only one among many hideous legacies of the period.

Given that the slavers were typically itinerant, though, and worked continually back and forth along various trade routes in preference to settling down in one spot, what had persuaded them to change their ways here, of all places?

Well, the local people had very nearly got away with a brilliant ruse.

The first raids by the slave dealers had come as a dreadful shock to them. Like the majority of pagan Africans they were of hospitable and unsuspicious temperament, so they had invited these strangers — armed though they were — to be their guests. They had never met Moslems before, but although they were under Arab leadership and some of them were Berber, the bulk of the new arrivals were blacks like themselves, or as Edusu vividly expressed it, "like enough to our cousins beyond the hill."

Moreover slavery had been previously unknown in the area. There was some bond-service, but this could be discharged when the debt that incurred it had been wiped out. You'll understand, I'm sure, how I'm supplementing what I heard from Edusu at the time with information I only collected later, but everything I subsequently found out squared with the version he first gave me.

So when the slavers rose at dawn and reached for their weapons and herded the salable boys and girls into the main square of Undumi — much the same then, I would imagine, as when we came to it in the 1940's — it was traumatic. And the visitors added insult to injury by declaring, as they went away laughing, that they would be back soon for more of the same.

Unwarlike as they were, it was plain the local people stood no earthly chance of defending themselves by force of arms. For one thing, the slavers might return at any time without warning, and the resources of a village like Undumi wouldn't stretch to a night-and-day guard on all possible approaches. For another, if they wanted weapons they would have to pay for them. There was no tradition of arms making in this area; the best they had were crude hunting bows. Now they had been deprived of their most attractive girls as well as their strongest youths. So they couldn't even obtain weapons as part of a bride-price, let along accumulate a surplus to buy them with.

Faced with this dilemma, the elders assembled in council under the direction of one of Edusu's ancestors who was also called Edusu. He made much of this point, as though some cycle of events had been completed by the coincidence of names. After long consultation of what, at the time, I assumed to be gods, but which I later learned would have been more like ancestral spirits evolved by their death into tutelary deities akin to the Roman *lares*, they hit upon what in my view was not only an inspired but also a typically civilized solution. A fever season intervened before the slavers returned, but next time they turned up they were greeted as warmly as before, given food and drink, and offered — on reasonable commercial terms — a wide selection of preternaturally docile candidates for slavery.

Admittedly they were no better than presentable; they were sluggish, they showed no signs of initiative or imagination, and would do only what they were told — that, and nothing more — and they were scarcely a patch on the first bunch recruited from Undumi.

On the other hand, at settlements where he had met with

armed resistance the leader of the slave gang had lost many of his best men and considerable profit. To find a village whose people were such cowards that they would welcome him by fawning in this fashion and offer slaves like Danegeld —!

Moreover, he was bred of a servile tradition himself. Any culture that incorporates slavery is servile; the condition's infectious.

And to ice the cake, as it were, there had been complaints from the Portuguese slave buyers concerning the rebellious nature of the last batch. They had come near to seizing the ship conveying them across the Atlantic, and the captain had had to hang several of the ringleaders for fear his crew would mutiny and take the captives' part. There must have been little difference between the crew's and the slaves' situation aboard such a vessel.

I picture the leader of the slave traders as small-minded although cunning; I picture the people of Undumi, particularly those who had dreamed up this scheme, as the opposite: inventive but naive. Having hit on a device which, the first time they tried it, spared them the worst of the slavers' depredations, and moreover cost them nothing — bar a bit of extra effort — which they hadn't been resigned to anyway, they relaxed.

Unluckily for them, the next reason the Portuguese found to complain about the merchandise was diametrically remote from the former. Too many slaves were being lost in transit. They were all right at the port; they were all right when they were led aboard; then, however, they perished while the ship was at sea, and gave off a peculiarly foul stench into the bargain. Concluding that the slave stock from this part of the coast was sickly, they threatened to make their purchases elsewhere.

Disturbed at the possibility of losing what they had thought of as a lucrative trade destined to continue indefinitely, the slavers might have done the sensible thing and asked the people of Undumi for advice. Instead, they sent for an expert from the great university of Timbuktu.

From their standpoint, that was a disastrous mistake. He took just one look at the latest group of slaves from Undumi and realized that to any devout follower of the Prophet creatures like these were anathematical. He rose up in his wrath, as they say, and gave orders he wasn't in fact entitled to issue. But as soon as he was apprised of what was going on, the local Qadi, under whose authority the slave caravans were theoretically operating, backed him to the hilt, equally appalled. The Qadi's orders,

which did have to be obeyed, went even further. He decreed that the slavers who had allowed themselves to be so efficiently deceived by infidels must expiate their fault. They must assume direct command over the people of Undumi and their neighbors too, and ruthlessly stamp out all traces, all relics, all hints or clues concerning the pagan trickery which had been put to such unprecedented use.

Unprecedented in their chronology, at any rate. Nothing like it, so swore the scholar from Timbuktu, had been permitted by the All-Merciful since the time of the Prophet! In this respect he was of course wrong. In all others, though .... Well, it made no odds.

That sealed the fate of Undumi and along with it of all the villages within a day's walk, until we turned up. The incursion of the French, who after winning some minor skirmish against the Portuguese claimed title to that corner of Africa — because it completed a pretty pattern on the map, I think, more than because they had any constructive use to put the land to — made scarcely a dent in the by then established situation. The Moslem overlords, unwilling as they were to forego their roving lives, worked off their anger at the Qadi's directive by carrying out his orders with exceptional brutality. Almost nobody who knew the secret was left alive to pass it on. Edusu was, he said, literally the last to inherit the technique.

Whether it was he or one of his predecessors who first realized how the method could be adapted not only to fossils instead of recent remains, but to fossils of a non-human species, I can't be sure. I think it may well have been Edusu who made that astonishing leap from the particular to the general, comparable in its way with the insights of a Newton or a Darwin. If it had happened significantly earlier, traces of it would surely have been found in the New World; certainly the basic technique was exported to Louisiana and the Caribbean islands, wasn't it?

Regardless of whether he deserves all the credit, though, he was a remarkable man. So when he expired peacefully a little before dawn, I paid him what honors I could and instructed the elephants to build a handsome cairn over his grave. And then I went back and finished the airfield. It was completed on time, even though Wimswell never got over the shock of seeing me arrive nearly naked and waving Edusu's shield and scepter. He did nothing constructive for the rest of our stay; Corkran and I practically had to hold his hand in order to keep up the pretense that he was still in command of himself, let alone the project. As for Fleaud,

he spent his entire time making sketches. After the war he returned with a team of paleontologists, and if you want to see an example of *Elephas primordialis fleaudii*, I'm told the skeleton in the Natural History Museum is, if anything, better than the one they took to Paris —

Ah! Not before time, either!

The interruption was occasioned by one of the wan limp dismal aides, who had presented himself alongside Mr. Secrett's pulpitlike desk mutely proffering the book about elephants which I had indented for earlier and a clipboard bearing the record-of-issue form without Mr. Secrett's signature on which no volume is allowed to leave RSAL premises.

Mr. Secrett scribbled his name and, as the whey-faced fellow departed, handed me the book with a smile.

"Here you are, Mr. Scrivener. I'm sure you'll find that this bears out what I've been telling you."

"Just a moment," I said feebly; I was still trying to get my breath back. "You said you finished the airfield?"

"Indeed we did. It was sheer bad luck that the fortunes of war dictated cancellation of the scheme for a South Atlantic Air Ferry. Smithers brought us the news, ironically enough, while we were toasting our success in what was left of Fleaud's cognac." Mr. Secrett shook his head. "A pity, don't you think? I mean, in view of all the trouble we'd gone to. That runway could have coped with Liberators."

"And you had no difficulty making the elephants work for you?"

"None at all. The principle was clear enough once you'd had it explained by a competent instructor, and Edusu proved to be one."

"But ..." I had to swallow hard. "But from what you said I was getting the impression that they weren't — uh — weren't real elephants."

"Oh, Fleaud was half right," Mr. Secrett acknowledged in an offhand tone. "Only half, though. They were admittedly an obsolete model, so to speak, quite probably exterminated by early man like the Irish elk or *Bos primigenius*. Nonetheless they were elephants in all significant respects, close cousins of the contemporary type, and my argument is not invalidated."

"That isn't precisely what I meant," I muttered. All of a sudden, however, I found myself disinclined to pursue the matter. Another of the grey vague aides had brought documents for Mr. Secrett to approve. Making great show of putting the book I'd borrowed safely in my portfolio, I waited for my chance to say good-by. Before it

arose, I thought of another and even more crucial question, and instantly wished I hadn't.

Once it was in my mind, though, I had to voice it.

"The slaves," I said. "The ones the people of Undumi presented to the slavers. Why did they not survive the Middle Passage?"

My hopes that he would attribute the phenomenon to something mundane, like the endemic fever of the region, were dashed at once.

"That was the fault of the Arabs operating the trade," Mr. Secrett said severely. "Not of Edusu's ancestors. The whole concept of *maintenance* seems foreign to the Arab mind. I had a lot of trouble on that account while I was in Egypt, so I speak with feeling. Combine that with contempt for unbelievers and a rigid prohibition against learning anything from them, and surely the reason becomes self-evident, does it not? At all events, I myself have never had the slightest difficulty in applying what Edusu taught me. *Mutatis*, naturally, *mutandis*. Which reminds me."

He glanced at the wall-hung clock which dominates the main aisle of the library.

"I'm almost overdue for an appointment. Did you come by car? If so, you might oblige me with a lift. The Metropolitan Casualty Hospital must be close to your direct route home."

"I'm sorry," I said firmly. "I took the bus today. It's very hard to park near here, you know. Good afternoon!"

Making my way to the exit, I passed four or five of Mr. Secrett's silent drab anonymous aides. None of them favored me with so much as a glance. Yet by the time I reached the door, I was almost running.

I think it may be quite some while before I visit the RSAL library again.

Coming next month

The November issue features WOLFHEAD, the first part of a two-part serial by Charles L. Harness. Veteran sf readers will know Harness as a masterful storyteller from his classic novel THE ROSE, among others. All readers are guaranteed to be delighted by this new novel. The background is a totally fresh and vividly drawn post-holocaust society. The pace is strictly FTL; the action is plentiful; the hero is heroic — a superior story on all counts.

"Tell them I'm only human, like everybody else."

Clifford Simak was the recipient of the 1977 Grand Master Award, given by the Science Fiction Writers of America in recognition of a long and honored career. Only two other writers — Robert A. Heinlein and Jack Williamson — have received this award. It's a pleasure to have Mr. Simak back with this fine story of a strange relationship between spaceman and a countryman.

Brother

by CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

He was sitting in his rocking chair on the stone-flagged patio when the car pulled off the road and stopped outside his gate. A stranger got out of it, unlatched the gate and came up the walk. The man coming up the walk was old — not as old, judged the man in the rocking chair, as he was, but old. White hair blowing in the wind and a slow, almost imperceptible, shuffle in his gait.

The man stopped before him. "You are Edward Lambert?" he asked. Lambert nodded. "I am Theodore Anderson," said the man. "From Madison. From the university."

Lambert indicated the other rocker on the patio. "Please sit down," he said. "You are far from home."

Anderson chuckled. "Not too far. A hundred miles or so."

"To me, that's far," said Lambert. "In all my life I've never been more than twenty miles away. The spaceport across the river is as far as I've ever been."

"You visit the port quite often?"

"At one time, I did. In my younger days. Not recently. From here, where I sit, I can see the ships come in and leave."

"You sit and watch for them?"

"Once I did. Not now. I still see them now and then. I no longer watch for them."

"You have a brother, I understand, who is out in space."

"Yes, Phil. Phil is the wanderer of the family. There were just the two of us. Identical twins."

"You see him now and then? I mean, he comes back to visit."

"Occasionally. Three or four times, that is all. But not in recent

years. The last time he was home was twenty years ago. He was always in a hurry. He could only stay a day or two. He had great tales to tell."

"But you, yourself, stayed home. Twenty miles, you said, the farthest you've ever been away."

"There was a time," said Lambert, "when I wanted to go with him. But I couldn't. We were born late in our parents' life. They were old when we were still young. Someone had to stay here with them. And after they were gone, I found I couldn't leave. These hills, these woods, the streams had become too much a part of me."

Anderson nodded. "I can understand that. It is reflected in your writing. You became the pastoral spokesman of the century. I am quoting others, but certainly you know that."

Lambert grunted. "Nature writing. At one time, it was in the great American tradition. When I first started writing it, fifty years ago, it had gone out of style. No one understood it, no one wanted it. No one saw the need for it. But now it's back again. Every damn fool who can manage to put three words together is writing it again."

"But none as well as you."

"I've been at it longer. I have more practice doing it."

"Now," said Anderson, "there is greater need of it. A reminder of a heritage that we almost lost."

"Perhaps," said Lambert.

"To get back to your brother ...."

"A moment, please," said Lambert. "You have been asking me a lot of questions. No preliminaries. No easy build up. None of the usual conversational amenities. You simply came barging in and began asking questions. You tell me your name and that you are from the university, but that is all. For the record, Mr. Anderson, please tell me what you are."

"I am sorry," said Anderson. "I'll admit to little tact, despite the fact that is one of the basics of my profession. I should know its value. I'm with the psychology department and ...."

"Psychology?"

"Yes, psychology."

"I would have thought," said Lambert, "that you were in English or, perhaps, ecology or some subject dealing with the environment. How come a psychologist would drop by to talk with a nature writer?"

"Please bear with me," Anderson pleaded. "I went at this all wrong. Let us start again. I came, really, to talk about your brother."

"What about my brother? How could you know about him? Folks hereabouts know, but no one else. In my writings, I have never mentioned him."

"I spent a week last summer at a fishing camp only a few miles from here. I heard about him then."

"And some of those you talked with told you I never had a brother."

"That is it, exactly. You see, I have this study I have been working on for the last five years ...."

"I don't know how the story ever got started," said Lambert, "that I never had a brother. I have paid no attention to it, and I don't see why you ...."

"Mr. Lambert," said Anderson, "please pardon me. I've checked the birth records at the county seat and the census ...."

"I can remember it," said Lambert, "as if it were only yesterday, the day my brother left. We were working in the barn, there across the road. The barn is no longer used now and, as you can see, has fallen in upon itself. But then it was used. My father farmed the meadow over there that runs along the creek. That land grew, still would grow if someone used it, the most beautiful corn that you ever saw. Better corn than the Iowa prairie land. Better than any place on earth. I farmed it for years after my father died, but I no longer farm it. I went out of the farming business a good ten years ago. Sold off all the stock and machinery. Now I keep a little kitchen garden. Not too large. It needn't be too large. There is only ...."

"You were saying about your brother?"

"Yes, I guess I was. Phil and I were working in the barn one day. It was a rainy day — no, not really a rainy day, just drizzling. We were repairing harness. Yes, harness. My father was a strange man in many ways. Strange in reasonable sorts of ways. He didn't believe in using machinery any more than necessary. There was never a tractor on the place. He thought horses were better. On a small place like this, they were. I used them myself until I finally had to sell them. It was an emotional wrench to sell them. The horses and I were friends. But, anyhow, the two of us were working at the harness when Phil said to me, out of the thin air, that he was going to the port and try to get a job on one of the ships. We had talked about it, off and on, before, and both of us had a hankering to go, but it was a surprise to me when Phil spoke up and said that he was going. I had no idea that he had made up his mind. There is something about this that you have to understand — the time, the circumstance, the newness and excitement of travel to the stars in that day of more than fifty years ago. There were days, far back in our history, when New England boys ran off to sea. In that time of fifty years ago,

they were running off to space ...."

Telling it, he remembered it, as he had told Anderson, as if it were only yesterday. It all came clear and real again, even to the musty scent of last year's hay in the loft above them. Pigeons were cooing in the upper reaches of the barn, and, up in the hillside pasture, a lonesome cow was bawling. The horses stamped in their stalls and made small sounds, munching at the hay remaining in their mangers.

"I made up my mind last night," said Phil, "but I didn't tell you because I wanted to be sure. I could wait, of course, but if I wait, there's the chance I'll never go. I don't want to live out my life here wishing I had gone. You'll tell pa, won't you? After I am gone. Sometime this afternoon, giving me a chance to get away."

"He wouldn't follow you," said Edward Lambert. "It would be best for you to tell him. He might reason with you, but he wouldn't stop your going."

"If I tell him, I will never go," said Phil. "I'll see the look upon his face and I'll never go. You'll have to do this much for me, Ed. You'll have to tell him so I won't see the look upon his face.

"How will you get on a ship? They don't want a green farm boy. They want people who are trained."

"There'll be a ship," said Phil, "that is scheduled to lift off, but with a crew member or two not there. They won't wait for them, they won't waste the time to hunt them down. They'll take anyone who's there. In a day or two, I'll find that kind of ship."

Lambert remembered once again how he had stood in the barn door, watching his brother walking down the road, his boots splashing in the puddles, his figure blurred by the mistlike drizzle. For a long time after he could no longer see him, long after the grayness of the drizzle had blotted out his form, he had still imagined he could see him, an ever smaller figure trudging down the road. He recalled the tightness in his chest, the choke within his throat, the terrible, gut-twisting heaviness of grief at his brother's leaving. As if a part of him were gone, as if he had been torn in two, as if only half of him were left.

"We were twins," he told Anderson. "Identical twins. We were closer than most brothers. We lived in one another's pocket. We did everything together. Each of us felt the same about the other. It took a lot of courage for Phil to walk away like that."

"And a lot of courage and affection on your part," said Anderson, "to let him walk away. But he did come back again?"

"Not for a long time. Not until after both our parents were dead.

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A

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Kent Golden Lights	**10**	**0.9***	**Kent Golden Lights**	**10**	**0.9***
Vantage Longs	11	0.9*	Merit	12	0.9*
Merit	12	0.9*	Salem Long Lights	12	0.9*
Parliament	12	0.9*	Virginia Slims	16	0.9
Winston Lights	14	1.0*	Silva Thins	16	1.1
Virginia Slims	16	0.9	Pall Mall	16	1.2
Tareyton	16	1.2*	Eve	17	1.1
Silva Thins	17	1.2	L&M	18	1.1
L&M	17	1.1	Salem	18	1.2
Viceroy	18	1.3	Kool	18	1.3
Raleigh	18	1.3	Belair	18	1.3
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Then he came walking down the road, just the way he'd left. But he didn't stay. Only for a day or two. He was anxious to be off. As if he were being driven."

Although that was not exactly right, he told himself. Nervous. Jumpy. Looking back across his shoulder. As if he were being followed. Looking back to make sure the Follower was not there.

"He came a few more times," he said. "Years apart. He never stayed too long. He was anxious to get back."

"How can you explain this idea that people have that you never had a brother?" asked Anderson. "How do you explain the silence of the records?"

"I have no explanation," Lambert said. "People get some strange ideas. A thoughtless rumor starts — perhaps no more than a question: 'About this brother of his? Does he really have a brother? Was there ever any brother?' And others pick it up and build it up and it goes on from there. Out in these hills there's not much to talk about. They grab at anything there is. It would be an intriguing thing to talk about — that old fool down in the valley who thinks he has a brother that he never had, bragging about this nonexistent brother out among the stars. Although it seems to me that I never really bragged. I never traded on him."

"And the records? Or the absence of the records?"

"I just don't know," said Lambert. "I didn't know about the records. I've never checked. There was never any reason to. You see, I know I have a brother."

"Do you think that you may be getting up to Madison?"

"I know I won't," said Lambert. "I seldom leave this place. I no longer have a car. I catch a ride with a neighbor when I can to go to the store and get the few things that I need. I'm satisfied right here. There's no need to go anywhere."

"You've lived here alone since your parents died?"

"That is right," said Lambert. "And I think this has gone far enough. I'm not sure I like you, Mr. Anderson. Or should that be Dr. Anderson? I suspect it should. I'm not going to the university to answer questions that you want me to or to submit to tests in this study of yours. I'm not sure what your interest is and I'm not even faintly interested. I have other, more important things to do."

Anderson rose from the chair. "I am sorry," he said. "I had not meant ...."

"Don't apologize," said Lambert.

"I wish we could part on a happier note," said Anderson.

"Don't let it bother you," said Lambert. "Just forget about it.

That's what I plan to do."

He continued sitting in the chair long after the visitor had left. A few cars went past, not many, for this was a lightly traveled road, one that really went nowhere, just an access for the few families that lived along the valley and back in the hills.

The gall of the man, he thought, the arrogance of him, to come storming in and asking all those questions. That study of his — perhaps a survey of the fantasies engaged in by an aged population. Although it need not be that; it might be any one of a number of other things.

There was, he cautioned himself, no reason to get upset by it. It was not important; bad manners never were important to anyone but those who practiced them.

He rocked gently back and forth, the rockers complaining on the stones, and gazed across the road and valley to the place along the opposite hill where the creek ran, its waters gurgling over stony shallows and swirling in deep pools. The creek held many memories. There, in long, hot summer days, he and Phil had fished for chubs, using crooked willow branches for rods because there was no money to buy regular fishing gear — not that they would have wanted it even if there had been. In the spring great shoals of suckers had come surging up the creek from the Wisconsin River to reach their spawning areas. He and Phil would go out and seine them, with a seine rigged from a gunny sack, its open end held open by a barrel hoop.

The creek held many memories for him and so did all the land, the towering hills, the little hidden valleys, the heavy hardwood forest that covered all except those few level areas that had been cleared for farming. He knew every path and byway of it. He knew what grew on and lived there and where it grew or lived. He knew of the secrets of the few surrounding square miles of countryside, but not all the secrets; no man was born who could know all the secrets.

He had, he told himself, the best of two worlds. Of two worlds, for he had not told Anderson, he had not told anyone, of that secret link that tied him to Phil. It was a link that never had seemed strange because it was something they had known from the time when they were small. Even apart, they had known what the other might be doing. It was no wondrous thing to them; it was something they had taken very much for granted. Years later, he had read in learned journals the studies that had been made of identical twins, with the academic speculation that in some strange manner they seemed to hold telepathic powers which

operated only between the two of them — as if they were, in fact, one person in two different bodies.

That was the way of it, most certainly, with him and Phil, although whether it might be telepathy, he had never even wondered until he stumbled on the journals. It did not seem, he thought, rocking in the chair, much like telepathy, for telepathy, as he understood it, was the deliberate sending and receiving of mental messages; it had simply been a knowing, of where the other was and what he might be doing. It had been that way when they were youngsters and that way ever since. Not a continued knowing, not continued contact, if it was contact. Through the years, however, it happened fairly often. He had known through all the years since Phil had gone walking down the road the many planets that Phil had visited, the ships he'd traveled on — had seen it all with Phil's eyes, had understood it with Phil's brain, had known the names of the places Phil had seen and understood, as Phil had understood, what had happened in each place. It had not been a conversation: they had not talked with one another; there had been no need to talk. And although Phil had never told him, he was certain Phil had known what he was doing and where he was and what he might be seeing. Even on the few occasions that Phil had come to visit, they had not talked about it; it was no subject for discussion since both accepted it.

In the middle of the afternoon, a beat-up car pulled up before the gate, the motor coughing to a stuttering halt. Jake Hopkins, one of his neighbors up the creek, climbed out, carrying a small basket. He came up on the patio and, setting the basket down, sat down in the other chair.

"Katie sent along a loaf of bread and a blackberry pie," he said. "This is about the last of the blackberries. Poor crop this year. The summer was too dry."

"Didn't do much blackberrying myself this year," said Lambert. "Just out a time or two. The best ones are on that ridge over yonder, and I swear that hill gets steeper year by year."

"It gets steeper for all of us," said Hopkins. "You and I, we've been here a long time, Ed."

"Tell Katie thanks," said Lambert. "There ain't no one can make a better pie than she. Pies, I never bother with them, although I purely love them. I do some cooking, of course, but pies take too much time and fuss."

"Hear anything about this new critter in the hills?" asked Hopkins.

Lambert chuckled. "Another one of those wild talks, Jake. Every so often, a couple of times a year,

someone starts a story. Remember that one about the swamp beast down at Millville? Papers over in Milwaukee got hold of it, and a sportsman down in Texas read about it and came up with a pack of dogs. He spent three days at Millville, floundering around in the swamps, lost one dog to a rattler, and, so I was told, you never saw a madder white man in your life. He felt that he had been took, and I suppose he was, for there was never any beast. We get bear and panther stories, and there hasn't been a bear or panther in these parts for more than forty years. Once, some years ago, some damn fool started a story about a big snake. Big around as a nail keg and thirty feet long. Half the county was out hunting it."

"Yes, I know," said Hopkins. "There's nothing to most of the stories, but Caleb Jones told me one of his boys saw this thing, whatever it may be. Like an ape, or a bear that isn't quite a bear. All over furry, naked. A snowman, Caleb thinks."

"Well, at least," said Lambert, "that is something new. There hasn't been anyone, to my knowledge, claimed to see a snowman here. There have been a lot of reports, however, from the West Coast. It just took a little time to transfer a snowman here."

"One could have wandered east."

"I suppose so. If there are any of them out there, that is. I'm not too sure there are."

"Well, anyhow," said Hopkins, "I thought I'd let you know. You are kind of isolated here. No telephone or nothing. You never even run in electricity."

"I don't need either a telephone or electricity," said Lambert. "The only thing about electricity that would tempt me would be a refrigerator. And I don't need that. I got the springhouse over there. It's as good as any refrigerator. Keeps butter sweet for weeks. And a telephone. I don't need a telephone. I have no one to talk to."

"I'll say this," said Hopkins. "You get along all right. Even without a telephone or the electric. Better than most folks."

"I never wanted much," said Lambert. "That's the secret of it — I never wanted much."

"You working on another book?"

"Jake, I'm always working on another book. Writing down the things I see and hear and the way I feel about them. I'd do it even if no one was interested in them. I'd write it down even if there were no books."

"You read a lot," said Hopkins. "More than most of us."

"Yes, I guess I do," said Lambert. "Reading is a comfort."

And that was true, he thought.

Books lined up on a shelf were a group of friends — not books, but men and women who talked with him across the span of continents and centuries of time. His books, he knew, would not live as some of the others had. They would not long outlast him, but at times he liked to think of the possibility that a hundred years from now someone might find one of his books, in a used bookstore, perhaps, and, picking it up, read a few paragraphs of his, maybe liking it well enough to buy it and take it home, where it would rest on the shelves a while, and might, in time, find itself back in a used bookstore again, waiting for someone else to pick it up and read.

It was strange, he thought, that he had written of things close to home, of those things that most passed by without even seeing, when he could have written of the wonders to be found light-years from earth — the strangenesses that could be found on other planets circling other suns. But of these he had not even thought to write, for they were secret, an inner part of him that was of himself alone, a confidence between himself and Phil that he could not have brought himself to violate.

"We need some rain," said Hopkins. "The pastures are going. The pastures on the Jones place are almost bare. You don't see the grass; you see the ground. Caleb has been feeding his cattle hay for the last two weeks, and if we don't get some rain, I'll be doing the same in another week or two. I've got one patch of corn I'll get some nubbins worth the picking, but the rest of it is only good for fodder. It does beat hell. A man can work his tail off some years and come to nothing in the end."

They talked for another hour or so — the comfortable, easy talk of countrymen who were deeply concerned with the little things that loomed so large for them. Then Hopkins said good-by and, kicking his ramshackle car into reluctant life, drove off down the road.

When the sun was just above the western hills, Lambert went inside and put on a pot of coffee to go with a couple of slices of Katie's bread and a big slice of Katie's pie. Sitting at the table in the kitchen — a table on which he'd eaten so long as memory served — he listened to the ticking of the ancient family clock. The clock, he realized as he listened to it, was symbolic of the house. When the clock talked to him, the house talked to him as well — the house using the clock as a means of communicating with him. Perhaps not talking to him, really, but keeping close in touch, reminding him that it still was there, that they were together, that they did not stand alone. It had been so

through the years; it was more so than ever now, a closer relationship, perhaps arising from the greater need on both their parts.

Although stoutly built by his maternal great-grandfather the house stood in a state of disrepair. There were boards that creaked and buckled when he stepped on them, shingles that leaked in the rainy season. Water streaks ran along the walls, and in the back part of the house, protected by the hill that rose abruptly behind it, where the sun's rays seldom reached, there was the smell of damp and mold.

But the house would last him out, he thought, and that was all that mattered. Once he was no longer here, there'd be no one for it to shelter. It would outlast both him and Phil, but perhaps there would be no need for it to outlast Phil. Out among the stars, Phil had no need of the house. Although, he told himself, Phil would be coming home soon. For he was old and so, he supposed, was Phil. They had, between the two of them, not too many years to wait.

Strange, he thought, that they, who were so much alike, should have lived such different lives — Phil, the wanderer, and he, the stay-at-home, and each of them, despite the differences in their lives, finding so much satisfaction in them.

His meal finished, he went out on the patio again. Behind him, back of the house, the wind soughed through the row of mighty evergreens, those alien trees planted so many years ago by that old great-grandfather. What a cross-grained conceit, he thought — to plant pines at the base of a hill that was heavy with an ancient growth of oaks and maples, as if to set off the house from the land on which it was erected.

The last of the fireflies were glimmering in the lilac bushes that flanked the gate, and the first of the whippoorwills were crying mournfully up the hollows. Small, wispy clouds partially obscured the skies, but a few stars could be seen. The moon would not rise for another hour or two.

To the north a brilliant star flared out, but watching it, he knew it was not a star. It was a spaceship coming in to land at the port across the river. The flare died out, then flickered on again, and this time did not die out but kept on flaring until the dark line of the horizon cut it off. A moment later, the muted rumble of the landing came to him, and in time it too died out, and he was left alone with the whippoorwills and fireflies.

Someday, on one of those ships, he told himself, Phil would be coming home. He would come striding down the road as he always

had before, unannounced but certain of the welcome that would be waiting for him. Coming with the fresh scent of space upon him, crammed with wondrous tales, carrying in his pocket some alien trinket as a gift that, when he was gone, would be placed on the shelf of the old breakfront in the living room, to stand there with the other gifts he had brought on other visits.

There had been a time when he had wished it had been he rather than Phil who had left. God knows, he had ached to go. But once no had gone, there had been no question that the other must stay on. One thing he was proud of — he had never hated Phil for going. They had been too close for hate. There could never be hate between them.

There was something messing around behind him in the pines. For some time now, he had been hearing the rustling but paying no attention to it. It was a coon, most likely, on its way to raid the cornfield that ran along the creek just east of his land. The little animal would find poor pickings there, although there should be enough to satisfy a coon. There seemed to be more rustling than a coon would make. Perhaps it was a family of coons, a mother and her cubs.

Finally, the moon came up, a splendor swimming over the great dark hill behind the house. It was a waning moon that, nevertheless, lightened up the dark. He sat for a while longer and began to feel the chill that every night, even in the summer, came creeping from the creek and flowing up the hollows.

He rubbed an aching knee, then got up slowly and went into the house. He had left a lamp burning on the kitchen table, and now he picked it up, carrying it into the living room and placing it on the table beside an easy chair. He'd read for an hour or so, he told himself, then be off to bed.

As he picked a book off the shelf behind the chair, a knock came at the kitchen door. He hesitated for a moment and the knock came again. Laying down the book, he started for the kitchen, but before he got there, the door opened, and a man came into the kitchen. Lambert stopped and stared at the indistinct blur of the man who'd come into the house. Only a little light came from the lamp in the living room, and he could not be sure.

"Phil?" he asked, uncertain, afraid that he was wrong.

The man stepped forward a pace or two. "Yes, Ed," he said. "You did not recognize me. After all the years, you don't recognize me."

"It was so dark," said Lambert, "that I could not be sure."

He strode forward with his hand

held out, and Phil's hand was there to grasp it. But when their hands met in the handshake, there was nothing there. Lambert's hand closed upon itself.

He stood stricken, unable to move, tried to speak and couldn't, the words bubbling and dying and refusing to come out.

"Easy, Ed," said Phil. "Take it easy now. That's the way it's always been. Think back. That has to be the way it's always been. I am a shadow only. A shadow of yourself."

But that could not be right, Lambert told himself. The man who stood there in the kitchen was a solid man, a man of flesh and bone, not a thing of shadow.

"A ghost," he managed to say. "You can't be a ghost."

"Not a ghost," said Phil. "An extension of yourself. Surely you had known."

"No," said Lambert. "I did not know. You are my brother, Phil."

"Let's go into the living room," said Phil. "Let's sit down and talk. Let's be reasonable about this. I rather dreaded coming, for I knew you had this thing about a brother. You know as well as I do you never had a brother. You are an only child."

"But when you were here before ...."

"Ed, I've not been here before. If you are only honest with yourself, you'll know I've never been. I couldn't come back, you see, for then you would have known. And up until now, maybe not even now, there was no need for you to know. Maybe I made a mistake in coming back at all."

"But you talk," protested Lambert, "in such a manner as to refute what you are telling me. You speak of yourself as an actual person."

"And I am, of course," said Phil, "You made me such a person. You had to make me a separate person or you couldn't have believed in me. I've been to all the places you have known I've been, done all the things that you know I've done. Not in detail, maybe, but you know the broad outlines of it. Not at first, but later on, within a short space of time, I became a separate person. I was, in many ways, quite independent of you. Now let's go in and sit down and be comfortable. Let us have this out. Let me make you understand, although in all honesty, you should understand, yourself."

Lambert turned and stumbled back into the living room and let himself down, fumblingly, into the chair beside the lamp. Phil remained standing, and Lambert, staring at him, saw that Phil was his second self, a man similar to himself, almost identical to himself — the same white hair, the same bushy eyebrows, the same crinkles

at the corners of his eyes, the same planes to his face.

He fought for calmness and objectivity. "A cup of coffee, Phil?" he asked. "The pot's still on the stove, still warm."

Phil laughed. "I cannot drink," he said, "or eat. Or a lot of other things. I don't even need to breathe. It's been a trial sometimes, although there have been advantages. They have a name out in the stars for me. A legend. Most people don't believe in me. There are too many legends out there. Some people do believe in me. There are people who'll believe in anything at all."

"Phil," said Lambert, "that day in the barn. When you told me you were leaving, I did stand in the door and watch you walk away."

"Of course you did," said Phil. "You watched me walk away, but you knew then what it was you watched. It was only later that you made me into a brother — a twin brother, was it not?"

"There was a man here from the university," said Lambert. "A professor of psychology. He was curious. He had some sort of study going. He'd hunted up the records. He said I never had a brother. I told him he was wrong."

"You believed what you said," Phil told him. "You knew you had a brother. It was a defensive mechanism. You couldn't live with yourself if you had thought otherwise. You couldn't admit the kind of thing you are."

"Phil, tell me. What kind of thing am I?"

"A breakthrough," said Phil. "An evolutionary breakthrough. I've had a lot of time to think about it, and I am sure I'm right. There was no compulsion on my part to hide and obscure the facts, for I was the end result. I hadn't done a thing; you were the one who did it. I had no guilt about it. And I suppose you must have. Otherwise, why all this smokescreen about dear brother Phil."

"An evolutionary breakthrough, you say. Something like an amphibian becoming a dinosaur?"

"Not that drastic," said Phil. "Surely you have heard of people who had several personalities, changing back and forth without warning from one personality to another. But always in the same body. You read the literature on identical twins — one personality in two different bodies. There are stories about people who could mentally travel to distant places, able to report, quite accurately, what they had seen."

"But this is different, Phil."

"You still call me Phil."

"Dammit, you are Phil."

"Well, then, if you insist. And I am glad you do insist. I'd like to go

on being Phil. Different, you say. Of course, it's different. A natural evolutionary progression beyond the other abilities I mentioned. The ability to split your personality and send it out on its own, to make another person that is a shadow of yourself. Not mind alone, something more than mind. Not quite another person, but almost another person. It is an ability that made you different, that set you off from the rest of the human race. You couldn't face that. No one could. You couldn't admit, not even to yourself, that you were a freak."

"You've thought a lot about this."

"Certainly I have. Someone had to. You couldn't, so it was up to me."

"But I don't remember any of this ability. I still can see you walking off. I have never felt a freak."

"Certainly not. You built yourself a cover so fast and so secure you even fooled yourself. A man's ability for self-deception is beyond belief."

Something was scratching at the kitchen door, as a dog might scratch to be let in.

"That's the Follower," said Phil. "Go and let him in."

"But a Follower ...."

"That's all right," said Phil. "I'll take care of him. The bastard has been following me for years."

"If it is all right ...."

"Sure, it is all right. There's something that he wants, but we can't give it to him."

Lambert went across the kitchen and opened the door. The Follower came in. Never looking at Lambert, he brushed past him into the living room and skidded to a halt in front of Phil.

"Finally," shouted the Follower, "I have run you to your den. Now you cannot elude me. The indignities that you have heaped upon me — the learning of your atrocious language so I could converse with you, the always keeping close behind you, but never catching up, the hilarity of my acquaintances who viewed my obsession with you as an utter madness. But always you fled before me, afraid of me when there was no need of fear. Talk with you, that is all I wanted."

"I was not afraid of you," said Phil. "Why should I have been? You couldn't lay a mitt upon me."

"Clinging to the outside of a ship when the way was barred inside to get away from me! Riding in the cold and emptiness of space to get away from me. Surviving the cold and space — what kind of creature are you?"

"I only did that once," said Phil, "and not to get away from you. I wanted to see what it would be like. I wanted to touch interstellar space, to find out what it was. But I never did find out. And I

don't mind telling you that once one got over the wonder and the terror of it, there was very little there. Before the ship touched down, I damn near died of boredom."

The Follower was a brute, but something about him said he was more than simple brute. In appearance, he was a cross between a bear and ape, but there was something manlike in him, too. He was a hairy creature, and the clothing that he wore was harness rather than clothing, and the stink of him was enough to make one gag.

"I followed you for years," he bellowed, "to ask you a simple question, prepared well to pay you if you give me a useful answer. But you always slip my grasp. If nothing else, you pale and disappear. Why did you do that? Why not wait for me: Why not speak to me? You force me to subterfuge, you force me to set up ambush. In very sneaky and expensive manner, which I deplore, I learned position of your planet and location where you home, so I could come and wait for you to trap you in your den, thinking that even such as you surely must come home again. I prowl the deep woodlands while I wait, and I frighten inhabitants of here, without wishing to, except they blunder on me, and I watch your den and I wait for you, seeing this other of you and thinking he was you, but realizing, upon due observation, he was not. So now ...."

"Now just a minute," said Phil. "Hold up. There is no reason to explain."

"But explain you must, for to apprehend you, I am forced to very scurvy trick in which I hold great shame. No open and above board. No honesty. Although one thing I have deduced from my observations. You are no more, I am convinced, than an extension of this other."

"And now," said Phil, "you want to know how it was done. This is the question that you wish to ask."

"I thank you," said the Follower, "for your keen perception, for not forcing me to ask."

"But first," said Phil, "I have a question for you. If we could tell you how it might be done, if we were able to tell you and if you could turn this information to your use, what kind of use would you make of it?"

"Not myself," said the Follower. "Not for myself alone, but for my people, for my race. You see, I never laughed at you; I did not jest about you as so many others did. I did not term you ghost or spook. I knew more to it than that. I saw ability that if rightly used ...."

"Now you're getting around to it," said Phil. "Now tell us the use."

"My race," said the Follower, "is concerned with many different art forms, working with crude tools and varying skills and in stubborn materials that often take unkindly to the shaping. But I tell myself that if each of us could project ourselves and use our second selves as medium for the art, we could shape as we could wish, creating art forms that are highly plastic, that can be worked over and over again until they attain perfection. And, once perfected, would be immune against time and pilferage ...."

"With never a thought," said Phil, "as to its use in other ways. In war, in thievery ...."

The Follower said, sanctimoniously, "You cast unworthy aspersions upon my noble race."

"I am sorry if I do," said Phil. "Perhaps it was uncouth of me. And now, as to your question, we simply cannot tell you. Or I don't think that we can tell you. How about it, Ed?"

Lambert shook his head. "If what both of you say is true, if Phil really is an extension of myself, then I must tell you I do not have the least idea of how it might be done. If I did it, I just did it, that was all. No particular way of doing it. No ritual to perform. No technique I'm aware of."

"Ridiculous that is," cried the Follower. "Surely you can give me hint or clue."

"All right, then," said Phil, "I'll tell you how to do it. Take a species and give them two million years in which they can evolve, and you might come to it. Might, I say. You can't be certain of it. It would have to be the right species, and it must experience the right kind of social and psychological pressure, and it must have the right kind of brain to respond to these kinds of pressures. And if all of this should happen, then one day one member of the species may be able to do what Ed has done. But that one of them is able to do it does not mean that others will. It may be no more than a wild talent, and it may never occur again. So far as we know, it's not happened before. If it has, it's been hidden, as Ed has hidden his ability, even from himself, forced to hide it from himself because of the human conditioning that would make such an ability unacceptable."

"But all these years," said the Follower, "all these years, he has kept you as you are. That seems ...."

"No, " said Phil. "Not that at all. No conscious effort on his part. Once he created me, I was self-sustaining."

"I sense," the Follower said, sadly, "that you tell me true. That you hold nothing back."

"You sense it, hell," said Phil. "You read our minds, that is what

you did. Why, instead of chasing me across the galaxy, didn't you read my mind long ago and have done with it?"

"You would not stand still," said the Follower, accusingly. "You would not talk with me. You never bring this matter to the forefront of your mind so I have a chance to read it."

"I'm sorry," said Phil, "that it turned out this way for you. But until now, you must realize, I could not talk with you. You make the game too good. There was too much zest in it."

The Follower said, stiffly, "You look upon me and you think me brute. In your eyes I am. You see no man of honor, no creature of ethics. You know nothing of us and you care even less. Arrogant you are. But, please believe me, in all that's happened, I act with honor according to my light."

"You must be weary and hungry." said Lambert. "Can you eat our food? I could cook up some ham and eggs, and the coffee is still hot. There is a bed for you. It would be an honor to have you as our guest."

"I thank you for your confidence, for your acceptance of me," said the Follower. "It warms — how do you say it — the cockle of the heart. But the mission's done and I must be going now. I have wasted too much time. If you, perhaps, could offer me conveyance to the spaceport."

"That's something I can't do," said Lambert. "You see, I have no car. When I need a ride, I bum one from a neighbor, otherwise I walk."

"If you can walk, so can I," said the Follower. "The spaceport is not far. In a day or two, I'll find a ship that is going out."

"I wish you'd stay the night," said Lambert. "Walking in the dark ...."

"Dark is best for me," said the Follower. "Less likely to be seen. I

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gather that few people from other stars wander about this countryside. I have no wish to frighten your good neighbors."

He turned briskly and went into the kitchen, heading for the door, not waiting for Lambert to open it for him.

"Good-by, pal," Phil called after him.

The Follower did not answer. He slammed the door behind him.

When Lambert came back into the living room, Phil was standing in front of the fireplace, his elbow on the mantel.

"You know, of course," he said, "that we have a problem."

"Not that I can see," said Lambert. "You will stay, won't you. You will not leave again. We are both getting old."

"If that is what you want. I could disappear, snuff myself out. As if I'd never been. That might be for the best, more comfortable for you. It could be disturbing to have me about. I do not eat or sleep. I can attain a satisfying solidity but only with an effort and only momentarily. I command enough energy to do certain tasks, but not over the long haul."

"I have had a brother for a long, long time," said Lambert. "That's the way I want it. After all this time, I would not want to lose you."

He glanced at the breakfront and saw that the trinkets Phil had brought on his other trips still stood solidly in place.

Thinking back, he could remember, as if it were only yesterday, watching from the barn door as Phil went trudging down the road through the grey veil of the drizzle.

"Why don't you sit down and tell me," he said, "about that incident out in the Coonskin system. I knew about it at the time, of course, but I never caught quite all of it."

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Another creepy Appalachian mountain tale — this time with an Indian background — from the master of such goings-on, Manly Wade Wellman.

Caretaker

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Round and pale blazed a goblin moon above the jagged murk of mountains to eastward. Owl Eye Haney's dinted pickup truck whirred along the deserted pavement. He turned upon the dirt side road that led up the flank of Dogged Mountain and switched off his lights. In the seat beside him, Whitey Van Doren caught his breath unhappily. Up they climbed on the narrow, bumpy way. A steep face of rock rose at their left, a darkling plunge at their right.

"If my hair wasn't ash-blond already, you'd turn it," quavered Whitey. "What are you doing, running in the dark on this tightrope? I can see my long home just outside this window."

"Give me a moony night and I can see near about as good as by day," Owl Eye told him cheerfully. "That's how come folks to call me Owl Eye." He spun them around a bend, close to the height. "And that's how come me to be as good as I am, prowling a house without a light needed. Like this here place we're headed for, what they call Chief's Mound. Relax, Whitey."

"But I fail to see why we can't have lights."

"I don't want nobody across the hollow wondering himself what's a car doing up this here lonesome trail so close to midnight. Trust me, I keep a-telling you. I can see your face plain right now. You look ready to die the death of a pet possum."

Whitey subsided a trifle, but only a trifle. He was chunky, pale-faced, pale-haired, dressed in butter-colored lounge suit.

"You told me those folks are known to have dug up gold objects from Chief's Mound," he said. "That's hard to believe. Gold, here in this part of the South."

"Shoo," said Owl Eye. "Before the old gold rush in California back

yonder in history, this state turned out more gold than anywhere else in the country. They had a mint for it at Charlotte. They still mine gold in Stanly County to this day. Other places, you can still wash a day's wages of it out, if you want to stand in cold water up to your hind end, swishing a pan."

"If Chief's Mound had things like that in it, why didn't somebody dig it up before now?" asked Whitey.

"You think it ain't never been tried?" said Owl Eye, urging the truck up a rutted stretch that looked no wider than a footpath. "Hark at me, when the Indians went out of here ahead of the first-come settlers, they spoke a warning not to scrabble round their old chief's grave. They allowed he wasn't only a chief, he was a medicine man. He'd left some kind of a devilish spirit there, to guard his bones and whatever was put under with them."

"You mean, that stopped folks looking for it?" White demanded.

"It stopped folks for a while. In them old days, they reckoned on creatures such as I myself never held with — the Beyonder, the Toll, the Flat, such ghosty things as that in them times. More lately, there's been two-three tries made. I've heard tell of one fellow who dug right deep, and then earth and stones come down on him and smashed him flat, like as if they'd been flung. Then somebody else tried, and right off it was pouring the rain, near about drownded him on his way down the mountain. Things of that sort kindly frailed the curiosity out of treasure diggers."

"But this man and his wife, the Copes, built their house there and got to digging," reminded Whitey. "Nothing seems to have bothered them very much."

"They come in here different. They're a Northern couple, man and wife, and they poke and gouge into old-timey things. I don't recollect the educated name for them."

"Archaeologists," supplied Whitey, grimacing nervously into the dark depth on his side of the rolling truck.

"That's what. Well, they took title to the Chief's Mound land. They gave it out they ain't laughing at no bad old Indian magic, but they ain't either scared. They've studied here and yonder amongst Indians out west, and knew the tribe that was here, on its reservation out yonder. They'd been taught some kind of charm or spell that they allowed would give them the upper hand over whatever might be making the trouble. Said if it showed up, they'd just collect it along with whatever else might could be in the grave."

"Ah," said Whitey, clamping

his eyes shut as the truck quivered its way up the mountain in the dark. "How much of such things do you believe?"

"Most times I believe what I know for sure, and that's all."

"And you know for sure the Copes are out of their house just now," Whitey prompted.

"I read in the county seat paper they'd go for a week to a science meeting in Washington. But I made sure. I watched them get a fill of gas at Tree Frog Glenn's service station, and they had the car full of suitcases and such as that, and picked up a road map to show them the best way to get up yonder. Don't worry about aught, Whitey; we'll be all alone at their place."

"I'll try not to worry," said Whitey, not convincingly.

"If you're a-going to be all scared up thataway, you shouldn't ought to have come along."

"I came along because I was told to," Whitey half snapped. "Mr. Frewin, down in Winston-Salem, said for me to stay with you all the time. If you were smart enough to figure on this job, you might want to hang onto some of what you prowled out of that house. He wanted to be sure you respected your deal with him, to bring him everything and take his fair price."

"Mr. Frewin," Owl Eye repeated the name. "I reckon he's the biggest fence in W.-S. The man who'll pay off on the nose and pay off something like a fair price, then get rid of what you've sold him so's nothing will bob up and fetch the law back to you. So you do what he tells you."

"I do everything he tells me," said Whitey shortly. "That's been my job for long years."

"And I see you got a gun under that stylish coat to help you do it. Me, I don't carry none. If I was to get caught in the act, a gun on me would be just an extra nail in my coffin when I went up before the judge."

They surged upward around a jagged shoulder, on the road that was narrower than ever between the abyss and the mountain. Owl Eye leaned forward to peer.

"Yep, here's their driveway."

He turned them off the road and in between tall shoulders. Gravel rattled under their wheels. On either side huddled massed evergreen trees, their needles brushing the truck's fenders right and left. Owl Eye drove more slowly, more cautiously, a full quarter of a mile of steep, snaky curves. They won at last into the moonlit open, and he steered them around a circle on a turfy lawn.

"This here's it," he announced, and braked the truck to a halt facing outward toward the driveway again.

They got out. Beyond the space

of the lawn rose a two-story house, blockily built, its timbered front gloomy in the night.

"Good," approved Owl Eye, studying the house. "There'll be some shine through them front windows."

"I see something like faces on the big doorposts," mumbled Whitey, without cheer.

Owl Eye craned his neck to look. "Oh," he said, "them's the two carved things the Copes fetched in to set up. Indians make them way up at the north. Totem poles, they're called. At the top of that one, there's a head with a buzzardy beak. Next down might could be a bear's face. Under that, just about the ugliest looking human thing."

Whitey shuffled his feet. "I hate to go in there past them, with them looking at me."

"You ain't a-going in," Owl Eye told him. "Just me. I'm the one of us can see in the dark. You hang out here alongside the truck and cock your ears, just in case there sounds like somebody a-coming up the driveway after us. You raise a yell for me if that happens."

Drawing on rubber surgical gloves, he stretched his froggy mouth in a grin at Whitey. There was a sharp-dressed city fellow, for a natural fact, but Owl Eye, in grubby jeans and worn denim jacket, flattered himself he was twice the man Whitey was. Whitey had come along because Mr. Frewin, that Winston-Salem fence, had ordered him to come. Owl Eye was there because he wanted to be, because it was his idea. He held up a bag of coarse canvas.

"I'll be a-fetching this back full, I hope," he said. Then he leaned into the truck and from the glove compartment brought out a flashlight.

"I thought you said you were going to do the job in the dark," reminded Whitey.

"I aim to, but maybe I'll run into some fine print somewheres and feel like I might could read it," said Owl Eye, grinning more broadly. "Now, you wait out here, the way I told you. If I ain't back from inside before that full moon goes down to the new, you can make a wish on it."

White said something profane, in a sort of unhappy groan. Owl Eye turned and, walking softly on foam-rubber soles, passed along a walk of broad stone flags. He mounted the wide stoop of the house and stood before the door.

That door was a massive one, oak by the look of it, clamped with great horizontal straps of wrought iron. It had a keyhole, and usually a keyhole was enough to let Owl Eye Haney jiggle himself a way in. He tried the knob with his gloved hand. Shoo, he didn't have to jimmy this door. It was unlocked.

"Mr. and Mrs. Cope shouldn't ought to trust their neighbors thisaway," he said over his shoulder to Whitey as he pushed in and found himself in a front entry. He closed the door behind him and stood motionless for a moment, listening.

Not a whisper of sound. The walls of the entry were sheathed in dark paneling, and Owl Eye, still silent, clamped his lids shut to widen his pupils to their utmost. When he opened his eyes again, it was easier to walk on and into a gigantic front room that seemed to occupy the whole half of the lower floor.

Two wide windows gave a wash of light from the moon. The walls here, in contrast to those of the entry, were painted a yellow shade not unlike that of Whitey Van Doren's handsome suit. This pallor caught the light from outside, giving a fair view of the interior. Owl Eye was able to make out the main appointments with some clarity.

At one end of the room towered shelves of books; at the other end gaped a broad fireplace of brick with a clutter of things on the spacious mantel. A door stood halfway open at the rear. Pictures hung here and there on the walls. A great bearskin rug, complete with the beast's snarling face at one end, spread on the floor. Beyond the rug stood a sturdy rectangular table, its top covered with papers and potted plants. There were chairs and a sofa.

And still no sound, anywhere. Owl Eye felt comfortably alone with whatever he might find worth popping into his canvas bag.

The tiers of shelves were nearest, and Owl Eye stepped close to them. They were set full of books, tall and small. He fingered the back of one — it was bound in leather and felt old and soft through the rubber glove. Books like that might be worth something, but he was never able to judge of books. Anyway, he wanted things of smaller size and bigger value. On he moved to the rear door, gazed into blackness beyond, then studied pictures on the wall.

There was an oil painting of an Indian warrior, stern as a hawk and feather-bonneted. Next to that, a map, with dark land and a wriggly looking coastline and light space for ocean. Owl Eye judged that it was an old, old map. Probably it was valuable, but it might be awkward to carry. He went to the table next to the snarling rug.

There were some stacked magazines, an open looseleaf notebook with a ballpoint pen across it, and three potted plants. Two of the pots were of earthenware, but the third gave off a pleasant sheen. He picked that one up. Sure enough, it was a heavy, massy metal thing.

Carrying it closer to the window, he told himself that it was gold. Indian make, he judged, with some sort of crosshatched design and a row of round things at the middle that plainly were freshwater pearls. Those old Indians must have reckoned that it was worth putting down with their dead chief, maybe with food for his journey to wherever the dead Indians go. Owl Eye dumped the plant and the earth upon the floor boards and dropped the pot into his bag. Then he crossed to the fireplace with those things on the mantel.

Abruptly he sprang back away, trembling, with a scratchy oath in his throat.

A snake held its taut coil there, among a grouping of other objects. It poised in its spiral, it lifted an evil, jowly head, its tail lifted with a corrugated tip aloft. Its eyes glowed in the moonlight. Rattlesnake!

But the next moment, Owl Eye subsided and made himself chuckle. Hell, that was just a metal figure of a snake, life-size and lifelike as it was. Those shining eyes must be jewels. Whatever Indian had worked that out knew what he was doing. The Indians had worshiped rattlesnakes in the old days, thought they were full of power, and no wonder.

He picked it up. It weighed his hand down, there must be several pounds of metal in it. Again he sought the window to have better light. The snake was roughly patterned, to look like scales. The eyes in its flat, splayed head looked shiny blue-gray. Sapphires, maybe? Into the bag went the snake, with a heavy chinking contact against the pot he had put inside. He tiptoed to the mantel again and studied the things still waiting there.

These stood arranged more or less in a row. At the left of that row, one of them stood tall, a foot high at least. It was a human figure, he saw, drawn up straight with folded arms, Indian fashion. He picked it up, feeling the solid weight of it. Its lower part was lean and straight, with a groove driven midway to show that it was meant for two legs. At the bottom for pedestal, were fashioned the feet, big and flat. If it had been copied from life, and maybe it was, that had been a tall Indian with feet like shovels. Maybe that was how the old chief had looked.

Jewels glowed in the head here, too, a pair of them for eyes, one jutting larger for a nose. Again at the window, Owl Eye thought that they would show pale yellow by daylight. He touched the nose to his forehead. It had a sensation of chill to it: topaz, then; Owl Eye knew that much about topazes and how they felt. He smirked over the statue as he slid it into the bag on top of the snake and the pot.

The second piece on the mantel was more grotesque. It, too, felt heavy in his hand. It was a squat figure, with short, bowed legs and a head with sprouting horns. White men would think it was a devil, but who knew what Indians thought it was? It was striped with rough-surfaced black, bar after bar of it on the gold, from bottom to top. That may have been gum from an ancient tree, evergreen pitch, a tree that the Indians worshiped. He grinned above the solidity of the grotesque thing in his hand. It would weigh several pounds, it had to be gold all the way through. This might be the best night's work he had ever done.

Dropping the chunky image into the bag in its turn, he took time to look around at the table. He wondered what the writing in that notebook might be. Something scientific, likely, it would have to do with the digging for these golden images. That grave-robbing man Cope, thinking to make himself rich, had just done the work to put the treasures in Owl Eye's hands.

The next thing in line on the mantelpiece took a moment of study. It was a humped mass, standing on four stubby lumps of legs. Peering in the shadows, Owl Eye made out a head at one end, with little curls of horns. A buffalo, that was what it must be meant to be.

There had been buffalo here in this mountain country, long back in Indian times. Folks told that the last buffalo hereabouts was a bull killed by a man named Rice, somewhere just before the year 1810. Owl Eye didn't remember the exact year, though the Rice family had told him the tale over and over. They told it so happily, with such relish, you'd think it had happened only yesterday, that all of them had had a good dinner of buffalo meat. All right, the Indians had known the buffalo the way they did the snake, and that made it all the better thing to bury with their chief. Into the bag with it. The bag began to hang and drag lumpily.

Next to where he'd taken the buffalo, sure enough, this was a golden toad-frog. It hunkered down, almost as big as the buffalo. Owl Eye took it up and turned it this way and that to study. Maybe those old Indians shouldn't be called savages, the way they were called in the school books. After all, weren't they one of what historians named the Five Civilized Tribes? Shoo, they'd had their own towns of wood and clay houses. They'd grown tobacco and corn and pumpkin squash and such things. They'd even taught themselves their own writing letters. Sequoyah, that was his name, had marked how white men could talk to one another on paper, and he'd managed some-

thing of that sort for his own people. They hadn't been just savages, managing all those things and shaping out as natural-looking a toad-frog as this one; though they'd been savage enough in battle, that was in history too. What if one of them came sneaking in here right now, to see who was monkeying around with these precious gold idols of theirs?

That wasn't really a happy thought, and Owl Eye shrugged it away. Oh, well, those Indians had been long years ago shipped out to a reservation in the west, and none of them hung close to these parts; though there was Indian blood in the old families, dating back to the first comers who, without any white women to marry, took themselves squaws. There was a strain of that blood in the Haney family. Owl Eye had a drop or two. Maybe those drops stirred in him now, making his heart dance a trifle as he harvested these Indian treasures.

The old medicine chief's clan surely must have used up all the gold they had picked up in cracks of the rock and beds of streams to make these things. From what Owl Eye remembered hearing, they hadn't much valued gold to buy things with; they'd used shell beads and fur pelts for that. Gold, he'd been given to understand, was good to the Indians because of its pretty yellow gleam. They reckoned it was bits of the sunlight turned solid. They'd never figured out why white men set such store by it for its own sake.

The last of the figures on the mantel was, he saw at once, a dog. The Indians had never worshiped dogs, they just liked them. Man's best friend, they were called by all races. Owl Eye had no dog of his own; the things he hunted never needed a dog along. But he could understand other folks, even Indians, having dogs around.

When he had put the dog into the bag, it was truly heavy. He wheeled from the mantel, and stopped. Not everything hanging on the wall was a picture. Along with the framed things was something like a plaque, picking up highlights all the way across the room from the window. He went to see what that might be.

It was roundish and more than a foot across, a massive mask of gold. Owl Eye set down his laden bag, used both hands to lift the mask from the clamp that held it to the wall, and bore it to the light at the window. It seemed to be made of many flakes of gold, skilfully hammered together, and it represented a sort of grimacing face. Again, there were eyes of some sort of bright stones — were they rubies this time, he wondered — clamped under massive, scowling brows. The nose was more like a snout, jutting

out boldly and set with flared nostrils. The mouth stretched all the way across the face, and a tongue protruded. It was a forked tongue, like that of a poisonous reptile. At the sides were big, pointed ears.

"You're a pretty boy, for a natural fact," Owl Eye addressed the mask, half aloud.

He was no judge of art, he admitted, but he knew that the things he had picked up here must represent as high a reach of native craftsmanship as those old Indians had ever achieved. They had given their chief presents of the best they could do, sculpturing what must have been all the gold of the tribe, gleaned here and there in generations of living in these mountains. Sliding the mask into his sack, he hoisted it with an effort. Sixty pounds it must weigh, he estimated. Just in gold, melted down, that would be a fortune. Gold brought better than a hundred dollars an ounce these days. So in melted-down form it would come to a hundred thousand dollars or more, for him to divide fifty-fifty with Frewin, the fence who was waiting to have a look.

But as relics, as wonders from the old Indian workmen, these figures would be worth many more times than that. Hell in the bushes, this meant that Owl Eye Haney had made his fortune.

Briefly he had a flashing vision of himself with all those thousands of dollars in his pockets. He'd buy a sharp suit, like Whitey's. He'd take a trip for himself. Las Vegas, why not? Buck those gambling casinos there. He wouldn't go in for just pure games of chance, nothing like shooting dice with the house percentage riding against him. He'd stick to blackjack; he played that right well. Go to Las Vegas, play blackjack and win, build his stake into a million. More than a million.

His eye fell on that open notebook on the center table.

For the page to be set like that, it must be some kind of important writing. Why not have a look, even if it was something that couldn't be understood?

Owl Eye dug his flashlight from his hip pocket. Clamping the fingers of a gloved hand over the lens, he pressed the switch with his thumb. A rosy glow fell upon the table, the notebook, subdued but light enough for reading. He bent down and studied the bold handwriting:

> From taped interview with Medicine Chief Weesowabi (Long Runner) at office of Spring Creek Agency, Oklahoma.
>
> That guardian can't be killed, can't be driven away from the grave. But he can be ruled if you do what I tell you.
>
> Gather those nine plants I

named and dry them out. Burn one dried plant at sunrise, every day for nine days. Each time, sing the medicine song I taught you, like this:

RuRuRu RuRuRu RuRu-RuRu
Hah nah jik paiyan hah taliyu
Hey nah-hay tay hay hee hoh
RuRuRu RuRuRu RuRu-RuRu

Then his power and anger against you is gone, though only against you. And he stays.

Did the Copes really do such crazy stuff as that? Burn plants, sing a song nobody could know? If that was so, they deserved to be ripped off.

As he straightened up from the reading, dark movement in the half-open door to the rear of the house.

A dog, Owl Eye said to himself, and a damned big one. They'd left a dog behind. Why in hell hadn't it come out before. It slouched heavily into the front room, almost like a bear, between Owl Eye and the way out.

"All right boy, just take it easy," Owl Eye coaxed it, wishing he had a whip or a big stick.

But it was standing up high, it wasn't a dog after all. It stood on its rear legs, straight as a man, bigger than a man.

It was as shaggy as the black bear rug on the floor as it took a heavy, purposeful step toward him. But its face was bald and sheeny, like worn black leather. Its ears jutted in points. Its eyes scowled, its great forked tongue lolled out, like on the golden mask Owl Eye had put in the bag.

Owl Eye did not move or make a sound. He only stared. The creature's upper limbs were lifting at him like arms as it closed in. They had hands, with fingers and thumbs, and on the fingers and thumbs stood out talons like the blades of black knives.

Outside, the melancholy Whitey Van Doren looked up at the sound of the front door opening.

"It's near about time you got out again, Owl Eye," he grumbled plaintively. "You took so long in there, I'd begun to figure you'd found a bed and gone to sleep. What did you find for us?"

But that wasn't Owl Eye, stalking into view, looming and blackly hairy, coming toward Whitey at a swift, squattering run.

Whitey screamed shrilly and snatched out his pistol. He fired three shots, point-blank. They must have hit, but the approaching shape did not falter as it charged at him. Whitey whirled and ran.

A stabbing clutch fell on his shoulder. Whitey screamed again, the last sound he was ever to make.

An offbeat and oddly moving tale by Michael Bishop, whose "The Samurai and the Willows" (F&SF, February 1976) was a Nebula award nominee. Mr. Bishop's most recent novels are STOLEN FACES (Harper) and A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE (Berkley/Putnam), both reviewed in this month Books column.

Leaps Of Faith

by MICHAEL BISHOP

At nine o'clock on Tuesday morning, Ridpest Ltd. dispatched Heinz Jurgens to Kudzu Valley, a small town nearly an hour away, and Heinz drove there in a blue Volkswagen with the blue and white company emblem on its doors.

The Mayers of Kudzu Valley, his dispatch notice said, had fleas — fleas slipping through the piles of their carpets, fleas doing Calaveras antics on the kitchen linoleum, fleas pirouetting in the shrubbery around the Mayers' foundation and porch stoops. Heinz's mission was to commit genocide upon the Mayers' fleas. An additional recommendation was that he impress upon this family the desirability of year-round control. As a newly trained Ridpestman knowledgeable in the ways of ants, book lice, carpet beetles, centipedes, house crickets, roaches (four varieties), silverfish, *and* fleas, Heinz would himself perform this monthly service for the Mayers, once they were under contract. He would cheerfully and professionally execute his duties.

Yes: execute.

As he turned into the Mayers' grass-grown driveway, Heinz felt a familiar headache coming back. Immediately his mind poised to leap away from the pain, but he actively resisted this movement and tried to concentrate on the business at hand.

The Mayers' house was two stories tall, a gingerbread monument to the turn of the century. Its gables suggested an enormous attic wherein all sorts of rascally vermin could foregather and breed. Heinz imagined them knocking and rustling in the night, vying for hege-

mony. If you saw the house as a living organism, that nighly warfare would be tantamount to a headache, the whole house beneath the attic (a vast two-story basement) standing aghast at the disorder upstairs. Just like my body now, thought Heinz. He recalled that you could divide the body of a flea into three parts too: head, thorax, and abdomen. But it wasn't likely that fleas had invaded the attic unless squirrels or bats had preceded them. You had to have a host, after all; that was essential for ectoparasites.

A man in blue jeans and sandals was inching his way around the perimeter of the house carrying an unwieldy bag. White powder sprinkled down from the mouth of the bag like sifted Bisquick. It was probably lime. Nimble but balding, the man going around the house was trying to lay down a chemical Maginot Line against the fleas *that were already inside.* As if a prophylactic measure could also be curative! Too little, too late. A melody began playing inside Heinz's migrane, and he wished that he were somewhere else, singing lustily. With difficulty he resiled to the moment and walked toward the house.

He was met at the kitchen door. The man with the lime sack wiped his palms on his thighs, and they shook hands. "'Shot' Mayer," the owner of the house announced. "Nice to meetcha."

"Heinz Jurgens. Eventually I've come from Columbus, to answer your call." He held up his company clipboard.

"What's that first name again?"

"Heinz. As in Heinz 57. Jurgens, as in the lotion." The timeworn explanation.

"Right. Right. And mine's 'Shot.' As in *shoot, shot, shot.* The past tense, you know — since I'm retired."

"You look very young to be retired." Introductory small talk. Through it all Heinz could feel his brain loading energy into a tight little ball: an elastomer whose thermodynamic release would spring him miles away and persons apart unless he kept its catches engaged. To relax the spectral muscles controlling these catches would be to do violence to reality.

"Well, I didn't really retire. I quit. This was during the bombings of Cambodia. I was a captain, flew B-52s. When it came time to re-enlist, well, I just didn't." Mayer picked a flea off his bare ankle and smushed it between the nails of his thumb and forefinger. Heinz heard the faint click of its exoskeleton's collapse.

"If it isn't seeming too personal," he began, looking at the torn screen door, fidgeting to get on with

his work, "what line is it you're in now?" That enables you to be home on a Tuesday? he wanted to add.

"I'm a househusband," said Shot Mayer. "I take care of the kids and tend the house."

The ball in Heinz's brain got smaller and smaller; the catches restraining its release wobblier and wobblier. It was November, cold. Somewhere there must be a statute requiring "househusbands" to wear sandals in November. The grass around the Mayers' kitchen stoop was leaping with life in spite of the cold, and Heinz could see black specks, like flakes of pepper, just below the knees of his Ridpest coveralls. Fleas ....

"I've decided to do the work myself," Shot Mayer was explaining. "Bought this lime from Wilson & Cathet's. Have an aerosol bomb of flea and tick killer too. That ought to take care of the carpets. I've already sprayed."

"Mr. Mayer —"

"Shot. Just call me Shot."

"Sir, you telephoned long-distance our company. It's an hour's drive from Columbus. All this way I came."

"I know, Heinz. I phoned again as soon as I knew I was going to do it myself, but you'd already left, see, and I guess your cars" — he nodded at the VW in the driveway — "don't have radios."

"No. Radios they don't have. And I drove forty-five miles to watch you dump such ... such junk around your foundation. It isn't going to work, Mr. Mayer. Not when you have fleas *inside*. I'm ... I'm ...."

"Hey, settle down —"

"This little headache I have ... it's something only I can know about. Up and down to Kudzu Valley not to do anything. All right, all right." Heinz waved a hand, compressed his lips. "A pretty ride, a pretty ride."

"Calm down, fella. Just slow down a bit." Shot Mayer was loading energy too, mostly in his biceps. His upper body was cocked, but it seemed that a kind of tentative sympathy had engaged a catch against his anger. Heinz could tell that Mayer wasn't going to lose control, not this good-humored man. "Like I said, I'm sorry. But we don't really need a Ridpestman now. This is the third day of our siege, and we're startin' to win .... Hey, it *is* a pretty ride, you take it slow."

"Ach," Heinz said, turning around disgustedly.

His catches disengage, and he catapults all the way from November to February, his saltatorial reflexes conveying him backwards a distance of 272 days at an acceleration of 140 g's. This is accomplished in little more than a millisecond.

He lands at a right angle to the point of his departure and reorients himself by squinting against the light and shuffling around so that he can see himself. On the old Gramophone his father has given him, the Airmen of Note, a service dance band, are playing "At the Hop," a moldy oldie first popularized by Danny and the Juniors. In his mirror Heinz sees the members of this group wearing Ridpest Ltd. coveralls and the formal mess jackets of Air Force enlisted men. Thus attired, Danny and the Juniors are singing to him. It isn't the sort of music he cares for, but as he lifts a razor blade toward the throat of the sandy-haired young man confronting him in the glass, he mouths the rusty lyrics: "Let's go to the hop, O baby, let's go to the hop," etc., etc. He scrapes the blade against his soapy cheek and then lets it fall stubble-gummed into the wash basin. This place in February, he realizes, is a substratum that must be escaped if he is going to survive either then or here, now or there. His migraine begins, automatically, to reload ....

"You're not being a very good host, Shot. Forty-five miles for nothing, and you don't even offer him a Coke."

"You want a Coke?"

"Please."

"Well, please forgive our fleas."

Shot Mayer opened the screen door, and Heinz passed through it and the inner wooden one into the kitchen. Mayer's wife was there in a laboratory coat such as those worn by Ridpest Ltd.'s R & D people; she looked like a dark-haired Lee Remick instead of Wernher von Braun, however, and she was holding two beaded glasses out to Heinz and her husband.

"Miriam, Heinz. Heinz, Miriam."

"Very pleased." Heinz took his drink and shook the woman's hand.

A furry green puppet was popping in and out of a trash can on the TV set in a further room; and two preschoolers sat rapt, unsmiling, watching the puppet. At least Heinz supposed their faces were serious. Since they both wore triangular dust masks, to be certain of their expressions was impossible. Something had been sprayed in the room, something caustically sweet. Flea and tick killer? It drifted into the kitchen like a heavily cologned guest unaware of the offense he gives.

"They won't budge from there when that's on," Mayer apologized. "So I made them put on the masks we wore to sand down the bookshelves in the library."

"Roust them out, Shot. It's not so cold they can't stand to go out. This isn't good for them."

"OK, OK." The television set went off with a familiar click, suddenly extinguished. It then took Mayer five minutes to get the kids out of the viewing room. Bundled into parkas, they whimpered about missing their program and not being able to move. Once outdoors they stood like two fireplugs, one blue, one maroon, beside a sunken sandbox beyond the kitchen's pilothouse window. Mayer went back to slinging lime around the foundation.

"You don't have any animals?" asked Heinz, finishing his Coke. "No dog? Not a cat? Do you know how all the fleas came in?"

"With me, I'm afraid. They escaped."

"Yes? From where?"

"I'm working with them upstairs," Miriam Mayer said. "Several different species. It's a shame Shot has to kill the ones that got out."

"Let me — let Ridpest, I ought to say — kill them."

"No, Shot's made up his mind. But you've come all this way, can you give us a general inspection? I'm not promising that we'll accept monthly service, understand, but maybe you could tell us how the house looks — if we're under any sort of potentially lethal attack, I mean. Then later —"

"Ach, I hear that all the time. 'Then later' never comes, Mrs. Mayer. If I leave your house without a contract, eventually I'll never hear from you again. Give me a break. I'm here. Let me do something."

"I'm trying to let you do something. But I can't commit my family to year-round service. Our finances won't permit it. Really. Would you like to see our bank book?"

"No, no. It's not for me to seem personal, Mrs. Mayer." He waved his hand. His headache had very nearly loaded to capacity again, and Heinz's body sought to orient itself in unfamiliar surroundings before being dragged away after his leaping mind. A crucial leap of faith, he knew, lay ahead or behind, awaiting whatever tensive trigger would squeeze it into focus. Not yet, not yet .... "What line are you in, if I may ask?"

"I'm a freelance researcher."

"Oh," Heinz responded. "Very good." Put upon or not, he decided to give this house a free inspection. And going upstairs behind Miriam Mayer, he leapt to a conclusion unpredicated on any previous experience.

Heinz is climbing a windless face of Mont Blanc. Below, Shelley's Ravine of Arve is mistily visible. Behind him comes Miriam Mayer in fur-lined galoshes and a thermally padded laboratory

smock. She carries a thermometer in one hand and with the other sweeps over the snow a box containing a microphone and a miniature amplifier. "It's six degrees Celsius," she shouts at him excitedly, "and the microphone's picking up activity from the substratum." "Our footsteps?" Heinz ventures, turning to face her. "No, no, definitely not. I designed this instrument to register sounds in a low range of audibility; it *screens out* crunches." "Ah. From where do these noises come, then?" "Up ahead, Heinz. Keep going." Further up the slope they see mobile specks on the snow, like little periods and commas leaping about on a huge sheet of foolscap. "Bird fleas!" Miriam exclaims. "A whole community of bird fleas! Even at this temperature they're leaping. Heinz, it's living confirmation of resilin's ability to release energy independently of temperature. Mere muscle isn't capable of that." *"Resilin?"* he wonders. "They're waiting for eagles, I suppose," Miriam goes on, oblivious. "The only hosts Mont Blanc can offer them are eagles." Gleams of a remoter world dance enigmatically in the eyes of Shot Mayer's wife, and with a crowd of homeless bird fleas leaping all about them in the Alpine cold, Miriam's amplifier crackling like a Geiger counter, Heinz takes this vibrant, sympathetic woman in his arms and kisses her deeply ....

"Where do you want to start?"

Heinz tried to collect himself. He began gathering his thoughts and compressing them into the inevitable little ball he helplessly believed to be the source of all his headaches: physical, psychic, social. Unless he did this, however, he wouldn't be able to function in the real world without inviting accusations of madness. Migraines were the price he paid to be considered sane. But more and more often the catches disengaged and flung him out of himself like a projectile. Why? Well, sometimes he simply let them go ....

"It doesn't matter. I can begin wherever you want, I think." They were in a child's room. The wallpaper repeated six or seven different forest animals against a muted yellow ground. (Two of the animals were designated in the company brochure as "pests.") Not terribly long ago the room had been sprayed with the same commercial product, intended for dogs, that Shot had used downstairs.

"Do you usually go into attics?"

"Sometimes. If possible."

Mrs. Mayer pointed to a passageway overhead. It was nothing fancy, a square of wood you pushed upward and set aside as you pulled yourself through. But the opening

was a good twelve feet up, and no ladder or footstool in sight. "We don't go up there very often," Mrs. Mayer apologized.

Heinz decided he wouldn't even try. "If you'd heard something guh-nawg-ing up there," he said, "eventually you would have called someone by now. Right?"

"If I'd heard something what?"

"Guh-nawg-ing," Heinz repeated. "Chewing." He held his knuckles to his mouth and gnawed at them in demonstration.

"The first *g* is silent, Heinz, and there isn't any *g* in the middle. It's *gnawing.*"

"OK. However you pronounce it." He thrust his hands into the pockets of his coveralls and peered about the room.

"Well, I have heard *something* up there, a squirrel more than likely. But a few mothballs thrown about ought to take care of that, don't you think?"

"You sure you want an inspection, Mrs. Mayer?"

"No. It was Shot who called you. Then he changed his mind. Really, Heinz, I'm just trying to let you do something while you're here. And I'm *not* trying to put you off by saying we can't afford anything until after Christmas. That's true. It's also true we'd like to have your company's initial service, *when we can afford it.* Do you see?"

"OK. I believe you." Heinz smiled and shook some of the tightness out of his shoulders. "Praise the Lord, I'm not a doubter like a few months ago is what I say."

"You're from Germany originally?"

"Naturalized American citizen. My father retired Fort Benning five or six years ago. Complicated deal."

"Well, if you want to, Heinz, you can start by looking around in here. Leave the attic be. As things stand now, it's probably dangerous to go up there." Her lab coat crisping about her legs, Mrs. Mayer moved toward the door.

"In a little town like Kudzu Valley," Heinz asked suddenly, taking a squeeze bottle of roach powder from his belt, "what do you do for amusements? If I'm not being too personal."

Mrs. Mayer halted and turned around. "There's not much, that's for sure. Shot and I go into Columbus sometimes, for a movie or a play. Here there's reading, or television, or bicycle rides when it isn't too cold. And my work itself is often an amusement, I'm afraid. Why?"

"I like reading too," Heinz responded, rehooking the squeeze bottle to his belt and fumbling for his wallet. "Winter quarter I'm eventually going back to school, Columbus College."

"Oh, good. In what?"

"Abnormal psychology." He extracted a business card from his wallet and approached Mrs. Mayer. "But gospel singing is my thing. Hymns too. Also my thing." He was self-conscious about his use of American slang, even after several years in the States, and the card somehow slipped from his fingers to the carpet.

Mrs. Mayer retrieved it. "The Witnesses of Glory Interdenominational Singers," she read. "Owen Bob Anderson, Director."

"Yes. It's been on television, Mr. Anderson's singers. From Atlanta. But not me, you see; I'm still just a new one."

She lifted her eyebrows slightly. "Does sound familiar, Anderson's name." Heinz knew that she was trying, with the very best intentions, to be polite.

"Well, if you're not busy on the last Saturday of this month" — he took a pen and wrote on the card — "I'd like to invite you and Mr. Mayer to come to our singing. Here. At this fellowship hall." He wrote the address.

"OK. I'll keep your card. It's just very hard for me to say what we'll be doing that far ahead. We've got a child in school who dictates some of these things, especially around this time of year."

"I understand. You put the card someplace where you can see it. On your mirror is good, I think."

"I'll do that .... The fleas are pretty much under control here, Heinz, but you go ahead and inspect for other things. Roaches and whatnot. I'll be in my workroom at the end of the hall. That OK?"

"Very good."

Heinz knelt and examined the crevices under doorjambs and the baseboards. He shone his flashlight into the cracks around the fireplace, in front of which sat a propane-burning space heater. He squirted roach powder into these cracks. An inch or two into one of them he saw the corpse of an American roach .... Not too bad. This was an old house.

Heinz began humming "Amazing Grace," almost as if the energy-loading ball in his head didn't exist. The Mayers were very good hosts. They knew how to make you comfortable even if they didn't particularly want you around. Maybe that wasn't the way to put it, exactly .... He walked on his knees to a desk across the room and shone his flashlight about beneath it. One or two fleas jumped feebly for his trousers, but they were survivors, desperate passengers already done for. Seventy-two hours unfed and a good dousing from Shot's aerosol bomb were just about as effective as anything Ridpest Ltd. could do. Cheaper too. He had to admit it.

"... *That saved a wretch like me,*" Heinz vocalized softly, standing up. "*I once was lost, but now* —"

What he saw on the desk surprised him, brushed him back like an unexpected blow. He put his hand out to touch it. A children's book, upon whose yellow cover a little boy in a bright red tunic was frozen in the midst of a prodigious leap. Below him stood a crenelated castle on a hillside. Heinz's mind sprang helplessly after the boy, catapulted by a taut recollection inside his migraine.

"*The Big Jump,* by Benjamin Elkin," Heinz reads. Trudi, aged four, snuggles on his lap and turns the pages for him. The story is about a king who promises a dog to a little boy if the boy can do the "Big Jump" to the top of his castle. The boy eventually wins the dog by jumping *one step at a time* to the castle's summit; the illustrations imply, however, that the king can do so in a single bound, like Superman. Although Heinz understands that the story's point lies in the boy's cleverness rather than in the king's superhuman abilities, Trudi insists on asking about the king: "How does he do that, go jumping so high?" "I don't know," Heinz answeres with some peevishness (this is the third night he's been interrogated in this way); "he's a king, *meine lieben.*" "Kings can't do that," Trudi pipes, each word a different note; "They're only people." "And this is only a book, Trudi. In books people can do all sorts of things, I think." This — the random license of books in assigning or denying powers — is an argument he hasn't used before. Will it still his daughter? No. As clever as the boy in Elkin's tale, Trudi goes at once to the heart of the argument: "Then why can't the boy go jumping so high, like the king?" Silence. Then Heinz bursts out laughing and hugs his daughter to him. When she begins bouncing about on her bed in celebration of his laughter, he takes off his shoes and joins her. The boxsprings under the mattress go *schproing, schproing,* and to escape Trudi's mother, who is hurrying through the house toward them, cursing audibly under her breath, Heinz on one bound from the bed knocks a trapdoor in the ceiling aside and on the next lifts Trudi with him into the attic. The attic is like heaven, another world. Up here a Salvation Army band in Ridpest Ltd. coveralls is singing "Amazing Grace," and for a time he and Trudi are safe among these smiling, winged musicians ....

Heinz found himself at the end of the hall. Light came through the transom above Mrs. Mayer's work-

room. He knocked.

"Come on in, Heinz. You can look around in here too, if you like."

The room was the largest one upstairs. Opposite him were three tall dormer windows, with window seats; light spilled in through their uncurtained panes like eggnog, thick and fragrant. The walls were light brown, the floor covering a linoleum in a brown-and-gold cobblestone pattern — not the soft, nappy carpeting that connected the other upstairs bedrooms and provided a peltlike hiding place for the Mayers' escaped fleas. Mrs. Mayer herself was standing at a long table cluttered with glass jars, retorts, tongs, and a jumble of equipment unfamiliar to Heinz. Another long table flanked this one. Despite the dormer windows, a chemical-stained wing-backed chair, and the cozy window seats, the room had the appearance of a kitchen cum laboratory, homey and businesslike at the same time.

"So," Heinz exhaled, glancing about. "This is where you invent, I suppose?"

"Research, yes. It's probably a crazy thing to try. Big companies and government agencies do this sort of thing so much better, but this ... well, this is where we've chosen to live, and Kudzu Valley's only industry is a poultry-processing plant."

"Can you make money doing this, working alone? I mean ..." He could feel his face reddening.

"Don't worry, Heinz; you're not overstepping the bounds of propriety .... I've had small retainers from Du Pont and the Phillips Petroleum Company in the past, and now I have a small government grant. Very oddball setup, I know. Sometimes I go to the state university to work, when I need someone else's opinion or access to a fuller range of equipment. Not often. I don't like to leave, really."

Heinz busied himself inspecting baseboards and squirting roach powder. Over his shoulder he asked, "Fleas? Is this your research?"

"Indirectly." She carried a bell jar from one table to the other. "They provided the jumping-off place, both literally and figuratively. Do you know anything of their anatomy?"

"Oh, yes." He straightened. "Every Tuesday night — tonight is one, by the bye — we must go to additional training classes, to stay up on all latest chemical methods and new regulations of the Environmental Protection Agency. Also pest facts. Sometimes we're tested on the pest facts — habits, anatomy, suchlike."

"Sounds like good policy. You know what the pleural arch is, then?"

"Never heard of it." Heinz

laughed at himself and Ridpest Ltd's mandatory Tuesday nights. "We're stronger on habits than anatomy, I suppose."

"Why not? I can't see where knowing what a pleural arch is would be of much benefit to someone whose job is extermination."

"No," Heinz agreed. "... What is it, this pleural arch?"

"An area above the flea's hind leg on its thorax. Poor species of jumpers have either reduced or altogether absent pleural arches, you see."

"Ah. You discovered this and the government gives you money? ... May I look in this closet?"

"Go ahead .... No, I didn't discover that; others did, long, long before me. The important thing is that the arch corresponds to the wing-hinge ligament in flying insects like dragonflies and locusts, and it contains — in the form of a ligament — a protein called resilin. That's what I'm researching now, a way to synthesize resilin in large quantities. I had four or five species of flea up here so that I could observe, firsthand, just what resilin is capable of doing for our little friends and, eventually, for us. That's what my grant's for, Heinz."

"Resilin?" Heinz came out of the closet as if into a vale of stinging light. He found himself staring into a jar containing several fleas. The fleas leapt while a microphone and an amplifier kept count.

"It's very nearly the perfect rubber, resilin is. Torkel Weis-Fogh of Cambridge calculated that it yields nearly ninety-seven percent of its stored energy when it's stretched and released." Mrs. Mayer went on to explain that this figure represented only a three percent dissipation of energy as heat, whereas with commercial rubbers the average loss stood at about fifteen percent. Resilin's thermodynamic efficiency accounted for the flea's ability to jump over a hundred times its own body length, even in low temperatures at which mechanogenic muscles fail to relax and contract rapidly enough to power such leaps.

About this classically precise explanation, Heinz felt, there was something familiar and disturbing. It fascinated him, but it made him uneasy. Extinguishing the life of a flea meant nothing (except, possibly, the restoration of order in a household overrun with them), and yet ... and yet their tiny bodies were crafted with such watchmaker exactitude and love that surely they — the fleas themselves — must mean *something*. Pinching one between your fingers was like breaking a valuable timepiece with a ball-peen hammer. Spraying for them was as great an affront to God's Daedalian genius and artistry as ... well, as what? Auschwitz?

Dachau? Heinz shook his head and stepped back from the bell jar on Mrs. Mayer's lab table.

You have a flea in your brain, he told himself. Didn't Susanna like to call you flea-brained when she was trying to teach you English? That was when, even before Trudi was born, she had you read from children's books ....

Mrs. Mayer was staring at him. Heinz roused himself. "What uses will this resilin have, Mrs. Mayer, If it's possible to ... to ..."

"Synthesize it?"

"Yes. Synthesize."

"Well, there's been some talk of incorporating it into the hip assemblies of either space suits or cybernetic organisms intended for use on the moon — as a means of exploratory locomotion, you see. The moon's low gravity would partially offset the additional, unflealike weight of a human being or a cyborg, and the ungodly cold wouldn't have any effect at all on the resilin in the hip assemblies."

"Ah. Human fleas on the moon." He could see them skipping from crater to crater, searching .... What were they looking for?

"That's one way to put it, I guess. Hopefully they won't be merely ectoparasites out to deface the moon and suck its blood. Resilin's supposed to have many stay-at-home commercial uses too, if that makes you feel any better."

"I don't know, Mrs. Mayer. These are things I can't envision."

"No, I can't envision many of them myself, and that's part of my job, really. It's hard to predict the exact uses to which one's work will be put. Research is a dicey field, Heinz. In several ways."

Somehow a test tube was dislodged from its metal rack. Heinz didn't know if he or Mrs. Mayer had upset it, but he watched from a great distance as it spiraled down from the table and fragmented on the linoleum, splintering like an icicle. Maybe he had taken it absent-mindedly in his hands. He stepped back. Then he leapt.

Susanna's bottle — his bottle, too — has shattered on the table edge. The scent of Jim Beam hangs medicinally between them, like an anesthetic. Trudi, thank God, is asleep. "Slow down, Susanna. You must get quiet, I think, before we can talk." "You made a big deal of it, Heinz; you made a big deal of it in front of Trudi." She's talking about dinner. She served frankfurters and sauerkraut, and when he attempted to cut into one of the plump sausages nestling in the cabbage, he discovered that it was enclosed in a nearly invisible membrane of plastic. Susanna had boiled the frankfurters without unwrapping them! "I just laughed," Heinz soft-pedals; "I just laughed

is all. That's not making a big deal." "It's what the laughter implies, Heinz, it's what it says about me and my worth and everything else! I can't take this kind of open ridicule from my own husband. Isn't it bad enough ... bad enough ...?" She stops (For several weeks she's been looking for a job.) As in an old gangster or waterfront movie, Susanna is holding the neck of the Jim Beam bottle in her fist, pointing its jagged ring at his belly. Weeping, wiping her eyes, she begins to stalk him. Heinz turns, dashes toward the living room's plate-glass window, and plunges through it like Erroll Flynn or Douglas Fairbanks. Unscathed, he lands amid a circle of Christmas carolers dressed as angels. They're singing "Silent Night" in the original German, but the words are as alien as the costumed children mouthing them, and he bounds away across the lawn in search of a translator. Columbus College, he tells himself, has a good language department ....

"That's all right. There wasn't anything in it."

"There could've been. Mrs. Mayer, I'm sorry. I'm clumsier than usual; it's this headache, off and on, off and on."

"Can I get you something?"

"No. I'd better finish, I think. Then maybe I could make a call — collect, of course — to tell them I'm eventually on my way back."

Mrs. Mayer followed Heinz downstairs. He went under the house and looked at the water pipes; two or three of them were dripping slightly, providing the moisture that roaches require and giving him an additional reason to urge monthly service on the Mayers. (You didn't suggest a plumber. That was "counter-productive.") In the kitchen he made his telephone call to the company's dispatcher's office.

"I'll be back in an hour .... No, not a great deal to do here .... Let me give you my report when I'm back, OK? ... OK."

Shot came in. "That's two bags around the house, Miriam. I think we've pretty much got 'em." He turned to Heinz. "Taking off, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm sorry we — *I*, I mean — did this to you. The long trip and all."

"That's all right," Heinz responded, picking up his clipboard from the kitchen table. "I'm deciding, I think, to quit my job, anyway."

"Why?" Mrs. Mayer asked. She sounded genuinely startled.

"I don't like it, I guess. Maybe I must test my faith. Lilies of the field." He stepped outside and looked toward the children perched

on the edge of their sandbox. The Mayers exited behind him. "Do you go to church regularly, Mr. Mayer?" he asked abstractedly when they were all outside.

"I'm Jewish, Heinz. Miriam's a lapsed Episcopalian."

"You don't believe in God?" Heinz asked Mrs. Mayer, turning on her the same startled look she had just given him.

"That's not it really, Heinz. I'm just not exclusively a Christian any longer, I'm afraid."

"Why? Everything I have, Mrs. Mayer, is from God, I think. Everything." He had forgotten his call to the dispatcher's office. The Mayers needed him. Him, Heinz Jurgens; not the Ridpest exterminator in whose coveralls he had necessarily appeared ....

Mrs. Mayer was at his elbow, maneuvering him gently across the yard to his Volkswagen. Beside the automobile she picked a flea off her ankle and cracked it between her fingernails, as Shot had done earlier. Then she examined the nail on which the tiny corpse lay broken.

"Aren't they amazing jumpers? They evolved from ancestors that flew, it seems. Natural selection modified the flight mechanism so that it could be used for these ridiculous, death-defying leaps. And they *are* death-defying, you know. If a flea doesn't make it from the substratum to a host, that's it, Heinz: 'The End.' No more flea. And resilin's the agency linking the two mechanisms." Mrs. Mayer was elsewhere for the moment, on a secret Alp of her own.

"Faith is a kind of resilin," Heinz blurted, finding the woman's wrists and clutching them with a frightened urgency. Then, standing in the cold, he explained how he had lost his marriage, custody of his daughter, and his own self-esteem in a series of alcohol bouts and senseless recriminations with his former wife. "In February, Mrs. Mayer, I was thinking of taking ... the easy way out. I was down at the bottom. Then came people helping me to see for myself what I really am. Now I go to a church where we sing our praises, where we talk in tongues, and every day I give my life to God, you know, and pray that whatever headaches I have He'll take from me. Once, like angels, we could all fly — but now we have to jump. Mrs. Mayer, I've jumped. Eventually it's better than being on the bottom, down and out. Eventually it's much better."

"I know, Heinz. I'm glad for you. I truly am. And I hope you're not making a mistake in quitting your job."

"No, no, surely not," he dismissed this concern impatiently. "Won't you and Mr. Mayer come hear us, Mr. Anderson's singers? You have the card I gave you?"

Back from her spirit's Alpine outpost, Mrs. Mayer promised him nothing. She told him that for two years while her husband was in the Air Force she had taught Sunday school, out of a sense of duty. She had finally resigned because she could not reconcile her knowledge of the world with what she was teaching the fourth-graders entrusted to her each Sunday. "And now I'm happier than I've ever been, Heinz. I wouldn't wish everyone else to follow me, that's true, but not because I'm somehow unfulfilled. Even with the compromises and deal-making life demands of you, I'm almost wholly fulfilled. Or *feel* as if I am. And I hope you don't wish that feeling away from me because I don't believe as you do."

"No, Mrs. Mayer, I don't." Heinz released the woman's wrists. "Surely I don't." He brushed a sandy lock off his forehead and stared at the high, wispy contrails blowing across the sky. His migraine was coming back. "I like you. I like your personality, which is honest .... Will you let me say a prayer? I feel like saying a prayer."

"All right. If you like."

While Shot Mayer rummaged in the garage for a tool of some sort, rattling pickaxes, shovels, hoes, and wooden-and metal-pronged rakes, Heinz folded his hands at his belt buckle and leapt upward to the God who had saved him from disaster in February of his adopted country's bicentennial year. What a cranky, unpredictable month February was. It would soon be coming around again, and he was thankful that in the interval he had found a point of focus for his wandering aspirations and loves. A host. Words came to his lips of their own accord, and he asked that the same joy and serenity slowly becoming his take a tenacious hold in the hearts of Miriam Mayer's family.

When he had finished praying, he found Mrs. Mayer's eyes on his; in them was a scintillation of light signaling a world of things she was powerless to explain, at least on a cold Tuesday in November when the sole issue uniting them was the slaughter of a menagerie of on-the-lam fleas. How, as human beings, could they close with each other ...?

"Good-by," Heinz told her. "I've enjoyed it, my inspection."

"Us too. Good-by, Heinz."

He backed his VW out of the driveway and waved at the children in the blue and the maroon parkas. Surprisingly they returned his wave, as did the adults who had joined each other in front of the garage. In three minutes Heinz was beyond the Kudzu Valley city limits, on his way back to Columbus.

"A strange one," Shot ventured.

"Yes. Almost as strange as you."

She took her husband's hand. He took hers. Just who initiated the touching neither of them could have said.

Twelve miles outside of Kudzu Valley he could feel the intricate little catches preparing to disengage. The sky was suddenly full of snow clouds. He took his VW to the shoulder, put his arms across the steering wheel, and lowered his head to his arms.

Three hours later a Ridpestman dispatched to find Heinz and hurry him back to work stopped his own vehicle on the road to Kudzu Valley and stared across the highway at the parked Volkswagen. Heinz didn't appear to be injured, nor was the VW damaged. A light snow was falling. The Ridpestman got out of his car and approached his fellow employee.

"Engine trouble? Come on. I'll drive you back."

A youthful man in company coveralls turned to look at him briefly, then revolved his eyes to the sky. After a small struggle the Ridpestman got him out of the Volkswagen and across the road to the other car — but Heinz Jurgens was somewhere else entirely, far, far away, and fetching him back wasn't going to be easy ....

"The First Stroke" from p. 60

No one.

Then across the scorched, blackened sidewalk, they came again, all the lines re-forming, heading for the scorched, blackened tops of the ant nests whose teeming tunnels honeycombed the ground under my lawn. Hundreds and hundreds, safely out of sight, untouched.

One line bent itself into a slight detour around the toe of my shoe and swept on.

One ant with a twig. One ant with a seed. One ant with a block of something. And one —

THE SUBTLEST DIFFERENCE

Since I write on many subjects in these essays, and always with an insufferable air of knowledge and authority, it would probably do all my Gentle Readers a lot of good to have me own up to stupidity from time to time. I will gladly do so, since I have many examples to choose from.

About two weeks ago, for instance, I sat in the audience listening to a private detective talk about his profession. He was young, personable, and a very good speaker. It was a pleasure to listen to him.

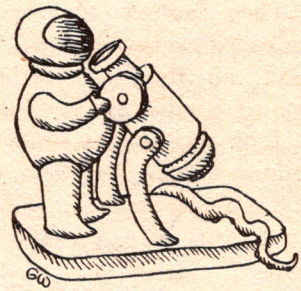
He told about the way in which he had helped get off an important wrong-doer by being able to show that the police had conducted an illegal search. He then explained that he felt perfectly justified in trying to get off people who were undoubtedly criminals because: a) they are constitutionally entitled to the best possible defense, b) if the prosecution's tactics are faulty, the criminals will be released on appeal anyway, and c) by insisting on due process to the last detail, we are protecting everybody, even ourselves, from a government that, without constant vigilance, can only too easily become a tyranny.

I sat there and nodded. Good stuff, I thought.

He then switched to humorous stories. One was about a profes-

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science



sional man, separated from his wife and living with his secretary. Wanting to get rid of the secretary, the man asked the private detective to follow the secretary and let himself get caught at it. The secretary would then tell her lover she was being followed and he would say, "Oh, my goodness, my wife is on my trail. We must split up."

Although the private detective did everything he could to be caught, the secretary refused to be disturbed about it, and the little plan failed.

Now my hand went up and, out of sheer stupidity, I asked a silly question. I said, "I understand the constitutional issues involved in working on the side of criminals. What, however, is the constitutional issue involved in helping some guy pull a dirty, sleazy trick on some poor woman? Why did you do that?"

The private detective looked at me in astonishment and said, "He *paid* me."

Everyone else in the audience snickered and nudged each other, and I realized I was the only person there who was so stupid that he had to have that explained to him.

In fact, so clearly was I being snickered at, that I didn't have the courage to ask the next question, which would have been, had I dared ask it, "But if being a private detective lays you open to the temptation to do filthy jobs for the money it brings you, why don't you choose some other profession?"

I suppose there's a simple answer to that question, too, which I'm too stupid to see.

And now, having warned you all of my inability to understand simple things, I will take up a very difficult matter indeed, the question of life and death. In view of my confession, nothing I say need be taken as authoritative or as anything, indeed, but my opinion. Therefore, if you disagree with me, please feel free to continue to do so.

What is life and what is death and how do we distinguish between the two?

If we're comparing a functioning human being with a rock, there is no problem.

A human being is composed of certain types of chemicals intimately associated with living things — proteins, nucleic acids and so on — while a rock is not.

Then, too, a human being displays a series of chemical changes that make up its "metabolism," changes in which food and oxygen are converted into energy, tissues, and wastes. As a result, the human being

grows and reproduces, turning simple substances into complex ones in apparent* defiance of the second law of thermodynamics. A rock does not do this.

Finally, a human being demonstrates "adaptive behavior" making an effort to preserve life, to avoid danger and seek safety, both by conscious will and by the unconscious mechanisms of his physiology and biochemistry, while a rock does not do this.

But the human/rock contrast offers so simple a distinction between life and death that it is trivial and doesn't help us out. What we should do is take a more difficult case. Let us consider and contrast not a human being and a rock, but a live human being and a dead human being.

In fact, let's make it as difficult as possible and ask what the essential difference is between a human being just a short time before death and a short time after death, say five minutes before and five minutes after.

What are the changes in those ten minutes?

The molecules are still all there, all the proteins, all the nucleic acids. Nevertheless, *something* has stopped being there, for where metabolism and adaptive behavior had been taking place (however feebly) before death, they are no longer taking place afterward.

Some spark of life has vanished. What is it?

One early speculation in this respect involved the blood. It is easy to suppose that there is some particular association between blood and life, one that is closer and more intimate than that between other tissues and life. After all, as you lose blood, you become weaker and weaker, and finally you die. Perhaps, then, it is blood which is the essence of life — and, in fact, life itself.

A remnant of this view will be found in the Bible, which in places explicitly equates life and blood.

Thus, after the Flood, Noah and his family, the only human survivors of that great catastrophe, are instructed by God as to what they might eat and what they might not eat. As part of this exercise in dietetics, God says: "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." (Genesis 9:4).

In another passage on nutrition, Moses quotes God as being even more explicit and as saying, "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh." (Deuteronomy 12:23). Similar statements are to be found in Leviticus 17:11 and 17:14.

Apparently, life is the gift of God and cannot be eaten, but once the

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* *But only* apparent. *See THE JUDO ARGUMENT, F & SF, April 1975.*

blood is removed, what is left is essentially dead and has always been dead and may be eaten.

By this view, plants, which lack blood, are not truly alive. They do not live, but merely vegetate, and serve merely as a food supply.

In Genesis 1:29-30, for instance, God is quoted as saying to the human beings he has just created: "Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat."

Plants are described as "bearing seed" and "yielding seed," but in animals "there is life."

Today we would not make the distinction, of course. Plants are as alive as animals, and plant sap performs the functions of animal blood. Even on a purely animal basis, however, the blood theory would not stand up. Although loss of blood in sufficient quantites inevitably leads to loss of life, the reverse is not true. It is quite possible to die without the loss of a single drop of blood; indeed, that often happens.

Since death can take place when, to all appearances, nothing material is lost, the spark of life must be found in something more subtle than blood.

What about the breath them? All human beings, all animals breathe.

If we think of the breath, we see that it is much more appropriate as the essence of life than blood is. We constantly release the breath, then take it in again. The inability to take it in again invariably leads to death. If a person is prevented from taking in the breath by physical pressure on his windpipe, by a bone lodged in his throat, by being immersed in water — that person dies. The loss of breath is as surely fatal as the loss of blood, and the loss of breath is the more quickly fatal, too.

Furthermore, where the reverse is not true for blood — where people can die without loss of blood — the reverse *is* true for air. People cannot die without loss of air. A living human being breathes, however feebly, no matter how close he is to death; but after death, he does not breathe, and that is always true.

Furthermore, the breath itself is something that is very subtle. It is invisible, impalpable, and, to early people, it seemed immaterial. It was just the sort of substance that would, and should, represent the essence of life and, therefore, the subtle difference between life and death.

Thus, in Genesis 2:7, the creation of Adam is described thus: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

The word for "breath" would be "ruakh" in Hebrew, and that is usually translated as "spirit."

It seems a great stretch from "breath" to "spirit," but that is not so at all. The two words are literally the same. The Latin "spirare" means "to breath," and "spiritus" is "a breath." The Greek word "pneuma," which means "breath," is also used to refer to "spirit." And the word "ghost" is derived from an old English word meaning "breath." The word "soul" is of uncertain origin, but I am quite confident that if we knew its origin, it, too, would come down to breath.

Because in English we have a tendency to use words of Latin and Greek derivation, and then forget the meaning of the classic terms, we attach grandiosity to concepts that don't belong there.

We talk of the "spirits of the dead." The meaning would be precisely the same, and less impressive, if we spoke of the "breath of the dead." The terms "Holy Ghost" and "Holy Spirit" are perfectly synonymous and mean, essentially, "God's breath."

It might well be argued that the literal meaning of words means nothing, that the most important and esoteric concepts must be expressed in lowly words and that these words gather their meaning from the concept and not vice versa.

Well, perhaps if one believes that knowledge comes full-blown by supernatural revelation, one can accept that. I think, however, that knowledge comes from below, from observation, from simple and unsophisticated thinking that establishes a primitive concept that gradually grows complex and abstract as more and more knowledge is gathered. Etymology, therefore, is a clue to the *original* thought, overlaid now by thousands of years of abstruse philosophy. I think that people noticed the connection of breath and life in a quite plain and direct way and that all the subtle philosophical and theological concepts of spirit and soul came afterward.

Is the human spirit as formless and impersonal as the breath that gave it its name? Do the spirits of all the human beings who have ever died commingle into one mixed and homogenized mass of generalized life?

It is difficult to believe this. After all, each human being is distinct, and different in various subtle and not-so-subtle ways from every other. It

would seem natural then to suppose that the essence of his life has, in some ways, to be different from every other. Each spirit, then, would retain that difference and would remain somehow reminiscent of the body it once inhabited and to which it lent the property and individuality of life.

And if each spirit retains the impress that gave the body its characteristic properties, it is tempting to suppose that the spirit possesses, in subtle, airy and etherial manner, the form and shape of the human body it inhabited. This view may have been encouraged by the fact that it is common to dream of dead people as being still alive. Dreams were often given much significance in earlier times (and in modern times, too, for that matter) as messages from another world, and that would make it seem like strong evidence that the spirits resembled the bodies they had left.

For modesty's sake, if for no other reason, such spirits are usually pictured as clad in formless white garments, made of luminous cloud or glowing light, perhaps, and that, of course, gives rise to the comic strip pictures of ghosts and spirits wearing sheets.

It is further natural to suppose a spirit to be immortal. How can the very essence of life die? A material object can be alive or dead according to whether it contains the essence of life or not, but the essence of life can only be alive.

This is analogous to the statement that a sponge can be wet or dry depending on whether it contains water or not, but the water itself can only be wet; or that a room can be light or dark depending on whether the Sun's rays penetrate it or not, but the Sun's rays can only be light.*

If you have a variety of spirits or souls, which are eternally alive, and which enter a lump of matter at birth and give it life, and then leave it and allow it to die, there must be a vast number of spirits, one for each human being who has ever lived or ever will live.

This number may be increased further if there are also spirits for various other forms of life. It may be decreased if the spirits can be recycled; that is, if a spirit on leaving one dying body can then move into a body being born.

** You can argue both points and say that water at a temperature low enough to keep it non-melting ice, or water in the form of vapor, is not wet; and that the Sun's rays, if ultraviolet or infrared, are not light in appearance. However, I am trying to argue like a philosopher and not like a scientist — at least in this paragraph.*

Both these latter views have their adherents, sometimes in combination, so that there are some people who believe in transmigration of souls throughout the animal kingdom. A man who has particularly misbehaved might be born again as a cockroach, whereas conversely, a cockroach can be reborn as a man if it has been a very good and noble cockroach.

However the matter is interpreted, whether spirits are confined to human beings or spread throughout the animal kingdom; or whether there is transmigration of souls or not, there must be a large number of spirits available for the purpose of inducing life and taking it away. Where do they all stay?

In other words, once the spirit is accepted, a whole spirit world must be assumed. This spirit world may be down under the earth, or up somewhere at great heights, on another world, or on another "plane."

The simplest assumption is that the spirits of the dead are just piled up underground, perhaps because the practice of burying the dead is a very ancient one.

The simplest underground dwelling place of the spirits would be one that is viewed as a grey place of forgetfulness, like the Greek Hades or the Hebrew Sheol. There the situation is almost like a perpetual hibernation. Sheol is described as follows in the Bible: "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master." (Job 3:17-19). And Swinburne describes Hades in "The Garden of Proserpine," which begins:

Here, where the world is quiet,
Here, where all trouble seems
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
In doubtful dreams of dreams,

This nothingness seems insufficient to many people, and a rankling feeling of injustice in life tempts them to imagine a place of after-death torture where the people they dislike get theirs — the Greek Tartarus or the Christian Hell.

The principle of symmetry demands the existence of abodes of bliss as well for the people they like — Heaven, the Islands of the Blest, Avalon, the Happy Hunting Grounds, Valhalla.

All of this massive structure of eschatology is built up out of the fact

that living people breathe and dead people don't and that living people desperately *want* to believe that they will not truly die.

Nowadays, we know, of course, that the breath has no more to do with the essence of life than blood does; that it, like blood, is merely the servant of life. Nor is breath insubstantial, immaterial and mysterious. It is as material as the rest of the body and is composed of atoms no more mysterious than any other atoms.

Yet despite this, people still believe in life after death, even people who understand about gases and atoms and the role of oxygen. Why?

The most important reason is that regardless of evidence or the lack of it, people still want to believe. And because they do, there is a strong urge to believe even irrationally.

The Bible speaks of spirits and souls and life after death. In one passage, King Saul even has a witch bring up the spirit of the dead Samuel from Sheol (1 Samuel 28:7-20). This is enough for millions of people, but many of our secular and skeptical generation are not really inclined to accept, undiscriminatingly, the statements present in the collection of the ancient legends and poetry of the Jews.

There is, of course, eyewitness evidence. How many people, I wonder, have reported having seen ghosts and spirits? Millions, perhaps. No one can doubt thay they have made the reports, but anyone can doubt that they have actually seen what they have reported they have seen. I can't imagine a rational person will accept these stories.

There is the cult of "spiritualism" which proclaims the ability of "mediums" to make contact with the spirit world. This has flourished and has attracted not only the uneducated, ignorant, and the unsophisticated, but, despite the uncovering of countless gross frauds, even such highly intelligent and thoughtful people as A. Conan Doyle and Sir Oliver Lodge. The vast majority of rational people, however, place no credence in spiritualism at all.

Then, too, about twenty years ago, there was a book called "The Search for Bridey Murphy" in which a woman was supposedly possessed by the spirit of a long-dead Irishwoman, with whom one could communicate if her hostess were hypnotized. For a while, this was advanced as evidence of life after death, but it is no longer taken seriously.

But then is there *any* evidence of life after death that can be considered as scientific and rational?

Right now, there are claims that scientific evidence exists.

A physician named Elizabeth Kuhler-Ross has been presenting statements she says she has received from people on their deathbeds that seem to indicate the existence of life after death — and a whole rash of books on this subject are being published, each book, of course, being guaranteed large sales among the gullible.

According to these reports now coming out, a number of people who have seemed to be "clinically dead" for a period of time, have nevertheless managed to hang on to life, to have recovered, and then to have told of their experiences while they were "dead."

Apparently, they remained conscious, felt at peace and happy, watched their body from above, went through dark tunnels, saw the spirits of dead relatives and friends, and in some cases encountered a warm friendly spirit, glowing with light, who was to conduct them somewhere.

How much credence can be attached to such statements?

In my opinion, none at all!

Nor is it necessary to suppose the "dead" people are lying about their experiences. A person who is near enough to death to be considered "clinically dead" has a mind that is no longer functioning normally. The mind would then be hallucinating in much the same way it would be if it were not functioning normally for any other reason — alcohol, LSD, lack of sleep, and so on. The dying person would then experience what he or she would expect to experience or want to experience. (None of the reports include hell or devils, by the way.)

The life-after-deathers counter this by saying that people from all stations of life, and even from non-Christian India, tell similar stories, which lead them to believe there is objective truth to it. — I won't accept that for two reasons:

1) Tales of afterlife are widespread all over the world. Almost all religions have an afterlife, and Christian missionaries and western communications technology have spread *our* notions on the subject everywhere.

2) Then, too, having experienced hallucinations of whatever sort, the recovered person, still weak perhaps and confused, must describe them — and how easy it must be to describe them in such a way as to please the questioner, who is usually a life-after-death enthusiast and is anxious to elicit the proper information.

All the experience of innumerable cases of courtroom trials makes it quite plain that a human being, even under oath and under threat of punishment, will, with all possible sincerity, misremember, contradict

himself, and testify to nonsense. We also know that a clever lawyer can, by proper questioning, induce almost any testimony from even an honest, truthful and intelligent witness. That is why the rules of evidence and of cross-examination have to be so strict.

Naturally, then, it would take a great deal to make me attach any importance to the statements of a very sick person elicited by an eager questioner who is a true believer.

But in that case what about my own earlier statement that some change must have taken place in the passage from human life to human death, producing a difference that is not a matter of atoms and molecules?

The difference doesn't involve blood, or breath, but it has to involve *something*!

And it does. Something was there in life and is no longer there in death, and that something *is* immaterial and makes for a subtle difference — the subtlest difference of them all.

Living tissue consists not merely of complex molecules, but of those complex molecules *in complex arrangement*. If that arrangement begins to be upset the body sickens; if that arrangement is sufficiently upset, the body dies. Life is then lost even though all the molecules are still there and still intact.

Let me present an analogy. Suppose one builds an intricate structure out of many thousands of small bricks. The structure is built in the form of a medieval castle, with towers and crenellations and portcullises and inner keeps and all the rest. Anyone looking at the finished product might be too far away to see the small individual bricks, but he will see the castle.

Now imagine some giant hand coming down and tumbling all the bricks out of which the castle is built, reducing everything to a formless heap. All the bricks are still there, with not one missing. All the bricks, without exception, are still intact and undamaged.

But where is the castle?

The castle existed only in the arrangement of the bricks and when the arrangement is destroyed the castle is gone. Nor is the castle anywhere else. It has no existence of its own. The castle was created out of nothing as the bricks were arranged and it vanished into nothing when the bricks were disarranged.

The molecules of my body, after my conception, added other molecules and arranged the whole into more and more complex form, and in a unique fashion, not quite like the arrangement in any other living thing

that ever lived. In the process, I developed, little by little, into a conscious something I call "I" that exists only as the arrangement. When the arrangement is lost forever, as it will be when I die, the "I" will be lost forever, too.

And that suits me fine. No concept I have ever heard, of either a Hell or of a Heaven, has seemed to me to be suitable for a civilized rational mind to inhabit, and I would rather have the nothingness.

"Films" from p. 63

I think I broke down and abandoned all critical acumen at the spaceport bar scene. For most of life I'd been reading about raunchy spaceport bars; I never thought I'd actually *see* one. From there on, I was 12 again and reading my first s/f novel (see above).

Does that answer your question?

All credit to everyone connected with *Star Wars*, but certainly above all writer/director George Lucas. Here at last, is a filmmaker who *knows* (and respects) science fiction. Since the Academy Awards are directly tied in to the financial (and popular) success of a movie, *Star Wars* and/or Lucas may win an Oscar. I'm all for it.

Some final thoughts ... a reminder that Lucas has done another s/f film, the visually beautiful and expertly conceived *THX-1138*, which I have mentioned often in this column.

And an uneasy feeling that *Star Wars* may replace *Star Trek* as a cult object for those who are into s/f TV and film rather than the written literature. "May the force be with you" may replace "Live long and prosper," God forbid. And a sequel is already rumored in the works, also uneasy making.

On rereading this column, I must say it proves the burble syndrome.

James Tiptree, Jr. won this years Nebula award for best novella ("Houston, Houston, Do You Read"). About this new story. Tiptree says: "This is a light *story, a little playful mind-bending, and I wouldn't want to see it labeled as anything heavy. So, could we steal a word from Graham Greene and call this merely an "entertainment"?*

Time-Sharing Angel

by JAMES TIPTREE, JR.

It's not true there are no angels; the young woman named Jolyone Schram spoke to one, with results that have astounded us all.

Whether what Jolyone talked to was actually an angel in the classic sense, we'll never know, of course; unless it returns, which seems unlikely. Certainly it was a space-borne Something of great power, a principle of the outer void, perhaps, a wandering sentience — possibly even, as some might claim, an interstellar commuter out of his usual way. Whatever it may have been, it heard Jolyone, and this is the manner of that event.

On the night it happened Jolyone was trying not to cry, while her teeth played music.

She was at her nightly job of news clipper and general gofer on the fifth floor of WPNQ's new building. Far up above her head towered WPNQ's new transmitter, which had just been erected on what had been the last wooded ridge behind L.A. The new transmitter was powered-up to cut through everything near it on the L.A. bands. It was so strong that while Jolyone stapled Telex flimsies, the big filling in her right molar clearly brought in Stevie Smith.

"I was much farther out than you thought, and not waving but drowning," sang her tooth. Jolyone's eyes blinked tears and her chin trembled, but it wasn't the song doing it.

The fact is that right there in Hal Hodge's office Jolyone was passionately mourning the death of Earth, which she had just foreseen.

She was nineteen years old.

The day before she had taken off to drive up the coast and over to

the piney-woods valley where she'd spent a lot of happy time as a kid. Her semiroommate had just split, semiamiably, and she needed some peace. She felt she'd been away from earth and woods too long.

It was dark before she got close, but she couldn't help noticing that there seemed to be a lot more houses than on her last trip. Finally the misty trees closed around her headlights, and the road was its bad old self. By midnight she drove over the ridge and pulled onto the verge. The mist was so thick she decided to nap til dawn and see the sunrise. All around was the peaceful smell of woods. A hoot owl called and was answered. As Jolyone drifted off to sleep, she could just hear the little brook purling through a cave she used to hide out in when she was little. She smiled, remembering.

Jolyone never saw the sun rise there.

In the first pale light she was jolted awake by the starting roar of a big diesel not a hundred yards away. It was joined by another, and another, and another — and before she was sure she wasn't in a nightmare, from the other side the high wicked yowl of chain-saws burst out.

Hands on her ears, Jolyone peered out at the thinning mist. Treetops were waving and crashing. She saw a line of giant earthmovers advancing past her straight across the valley. A horrifying great misty mountain of trees, rocks, earth, everything was spewing out of the monsters' blades. Behind them stretched raw gravel.

Aghast, Jolyone whirled in her seat, trying to disbelieve the devastation. From nowhere a back-hoe bucket rose up beside her, so close that she could see a small dusty body still struggling in the rocks. A kit-fox, her eyes noted numbly.

With a wordless moan she threw the VW in gear and shot back over the ridge. As she went she saw she had spent the night under a huge signboard painted with a man's grinning face: A THOUSAND MORE HAPPY HOMES BY HAPPY HARRY JOEL.

"Oh no, *Oh no*," Jolyone wept to herself as she drove shakenly down toward the coast. The darkness had fooled her coming in, she saw. There weren't just a few more houses among the trees. From horizon to horizon the foothills were covered by houses, houses, houses everywhere, with only a thin line of dried trees by the old road. Her valley had been the last patch of woods left.

"How could they, it was so, so —" she whispered incoherently, trying to find a word for all lost defenseless beauty, for all that she had loved deeply without really

knowing it, and believed would always endure.

When she finally got onto the freeway approaches, the hurt was calmer. It was a fine sunny day. As she sailed up the ramp into the southbound lanes, she noticed something else she had missed the night before. The sea up north had a funny black-looking scum edge on it. An oil slick?

"It's the biggest one yet," the girl at the Burgerchef rest stop told her, nodding proprietarily. "They say it killed all those seal otters of whatever — hey, don't you want your Supercheese?"

Jolyone drove on back to her job, trying to lose herself in the long thrumming hypnosis of the freeway traffic. The sun shone whitely on her from the thickening veils of the sky; trucks, cars, vans roared beside her, ahead, behind. The grief that had shaken her calmed to the rhythm of driving on and on. But, somewhere underneath, her mind kept chewing on it.

A thousand new homes, on top of all those other thousands ... Jolyone had once heard her generation described as "the baby boom's baby boom." She'd always intended, in a vague way, to have kids. But now all the bits and pieces of her standard education began to add up. The "ecology" — it wasn't something distant, somewhere else with strip mines. It was the awful devastation of her lovely valley, the broken little body in the back-hoe bucket. And that oil slick ... she herself was driving a car right now. Probably she would have used some of the oil that spilled. It was being brought for people like her. For thousands, millions of people just like her.

To get away from the idea she tuned the radio to catch the end of Hal Hodge's newsbreak. Nothing but a filler about some mountains in Nepal that had slid down because the people had used up all the trees for firewood. Then he switched to WPNQ's Pop Hour, and she thankfully let thought go with the dreamy beat. *Twenty-nine colors of blue* ....

The miles passed.

Finally she was turning into the station parking lot. Mimi Lavery was subbing for Hal on the evening news; Jolyone listened critically, hoping Mimi would pitch her voice low. Mimi ended with another filler, something about how the population was going up again and was expected to double in thirty years, and cut to a taped ad for condominiums in the Rockies.

And right then, all in the second between parking the Volks and pulling out her car keys, it happened.

Jolyone Schram *knew*.

It came to her as a vision of a billion-headed monstrous wave, a

huge spreading flood of multiplying people, people unending, forming in their billions a great devouring mindless incubus that spread around the green ball of Earth — blotting out everything, eating everything, using everything, expanding and destroying without limit on a finite surface. Hordes of individually innocent people made frightful by their numbers bulged out into and under the oceans, tunneled underground, flowed over the mountains, surging and covering everything everywhere. Billions of heads gaped, grinned at her, billions of hands reached and grasped blindly as the torrent of bodies flooded over the world.

That was what was happening, slower or faster, all around her. And it would continue, faster and faster, to the oncoming end.

Jolyone gasped, falling back into the car seat. She was a gentle girl, unsuited to apocalyptic visions. But she had also an innocent fact-mindedness; she actually believed in numbers. All in that terrible instant she saw what the numbers meant. *Doubling in thirty* years — and then doubling again and again, quicker each time. It was happening. Not somewhere else in some remote lifetime, but right here and now. She was seeing it begin. With all the singleness of her nineteen-year-old mind she suddenly, totally believed.

And all in that same second it came to her how much she would suffer and how helpless she was. How could she live in that tumult of people, without room or peace, with no refuge to escape to? But she couldn't stop it, no one could — she saw that too. People just wouldn't stop having kids, she knew that in her blood. Pointing a gun at a President wouldn't save the redwoods; all those organizations to save a river or a mountain wouldn't delay matters much. Because nothing could stop those *numbers.* In the cold time-light of her vision she saw the flurries of protest, speeches, little movements, hopes and local successes and good intentions — all swept away by the relentless multitudes, like the line of buckling trees she had seen go down in the valley. Numbers talk. Nothing can stop it, really, she thought. Everything I love will go.

She sat trembling, too shaken to cry. After a while things eased a little. Since there seemed to be nothing else to do, she picked up the fallen car keys and went on in to her job.

In the studio no one noticed her. It was an off-night. A couple of engineers were still trying to fix that oscillation in the booster circuits; they had a panel torn down.

Jolyone went leadenly about her work, sorting the Telex pile, putting back the used tapes, answering

phones in the empty offices, doing zombie-like whatever she was asked. Her teeth whispered the late sports round up. The vision that had hit her didn't go away. It surrounded her head like a ghostly projection, making the real world outside as thin as a momentary dream. Every now and then her eyes leaked uncontrollably when she thought of something dear to her that wouldn't be around much longer. High-rise developers were already buying up the scraggly old garden block she and her friends lived in. That was just one first soft nudging edge of the terrible future she had foreseen. With all the clarity of her nineteen years Jolyone was saying good-by to something deep and vital, to hope itself maybe.

At ten thirty Hal Hodge's usual batch of almost-celebrities came in for Tonight Talk. One of them was a science-fiction writer, a short, jumpy older man, neurotically worried that his car would be towed away. Jolyone got him some Kleenex for his cold, gave them all coffee and got them into Hal's hands during the station break.

As she shut the door, one of the equipment men called her over to the torn-out board.

"Hold this a sec." He handed her a big complicated jack trailing cables. "Don't let it touch anything, that's right. Look, when I say 'break,' you push that circuit breaker up here with your other hand. Got it?"

Jolyone nodded; she was having trouble with her eyes again.

The engineer dived down and wriggled in under the panel. Jolyone stood holding the thing. Her teeth were even louder here; she heard Hal Hodge's sincerely interested voice. "What are people like us going to be doing a hundred years from now, Bill?"

"Standing on each other's throats," the science-fiction writer said in her tooth, and sneezed.

The whole horrible vision came back onto Jolyone, and with it something worse she hadn't seen before. "Oh, no, no, no," she whispered, feeling a big tear start down her cheek. She couldn't wipe it.

What she had seen were the expressions on that oncoming mountain of people. Their faces snarled, mouths gnashing in hatred, leering in triumph, wailing in desperate loss; eyes narrowed in cold calculation; hands clutched knives or guns and fought as the tide rolled over them. Here a few combined for a moment in furious victory, only to go under as new faces overrode them. From under every foot rose the weak cries of the trampled and dying. Nowhere in all that panorama of strife was kindness, nowhere was anything she

thought of as human — only the war of all against all raging on the despoiled earth.

When've destroyed everything we'll be animals, she thought. A great sob rose in her throat compounded of doomed beauty and the hideous revelation that what she had taken for the reality of people was a fragile dream about to perish. "*No*," she choked.

"Hit it!" barked the engineer from under the board.

Blind and shaking, Jolyone reached across the open board. Tears ran unheeded down her jaw and splashed complex electrolytes where no such things should be. In anguish, Jolyone whispered a prayer to the empty air. "Make it stop, *please*."

There was a sudden total silence that crackled.

"*Piontwxq?*" said her filling sharply in the stillness. "*Eh! Stop what?*"

"Make us stop," Jolyone repeated crazily, unaware that her cry was howling out on unknown frequencies, unaware of anything except her pain. "Make us stop making more people before we kill everything! Oh, *please* don't let it happen, don't let all the beautiful world be killed!"

"*Wait*," said the tiny voice in her jawbone. Jolyone's eyes suddenly got as big as Hal Hodge's mouth. "*Oh, very well*," the voice went on. "*You can stop crying now.*"

It sounded far away and preoccupied, and it wasn't speaking English, although Jolyone never knew that.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Who — wha —?"

"Holy crap!" The engineer exploded out from under the panel and started grabbing things. Hal Hodge shot from the booth and collided with the sound man, both of them yelling. In the uproar Jolyone saw the science-fiction scuttle out clutching his car keys and shaking his head.

Then she was being chewed out for letting the hypermixer touch the goobiliser, and it was all entirely too much.

Meanwhile, twenty-two thousand miles out in space, the Something — being, djinn, essence, or what have you — completed a tiny swift adjustment to the last of our synchronized satellites. Then he or she or it zipped into a parabolic pass down through earth's atmosphere. As it hurtled down, it opened something that wasnt a briefcase. The orbit noded over the Andes and something very small dropped into a crevasse.

Next instant, our visitor was out again and receding into the depths of space with the thing that wasn't a briefcase tucked under its — well, whatever it was under. Could you have translated the expression on

what might have been its face, you would have been reminded of the look worn by a passing grown-up who has stopped to retrieve a kid's lost ball.

And that's the last we've known of it to this day.

But as the next morning's light spread round the world, we all know what was revealed.

In every home, every apartment or igloo or cave or grass hut from Fiji to New York to Archangel, the scene was the same. One baby and only one awoke — the youngest. All the other children lay unstirring; on mats, in beds or hammocks or cribs or fur piles, all but the youngest lay apparently asleep.

A moment later started the billion-throated scream that followed the sunrise round the world. Mothers discovered the sleeping children's flesh was cool, their chests were silent. No breath moved their lips. Girls and boys from two to twenty, all siblings of whatever age, lay moveless and cold. Even the grown ones not at home were found lying lifeless.

Death, it seemed, had reaped the earth of all but the last-borns.

But among the frantic parents were a few persistent ones who held mirrors to the still lips and listened longer at the cooling breasts. And finally it was known: the children were not dead. Slower than glaciers, breath moved in them. Slower than the ooze of rock, their blood flowed still and the infinitely languorous hearts squeezed and relaxed. They were not dead but sleeping — or rather, as their temperatures fell and fell, it was understood that this was a sleep like hibernation, but deeper than any ever known.

And they could not be waked or revived. Doctors, shamans, mothers en masse attacked the sleepers with heat or cold or shock, with any or every stimulus that could possibly or inpossibly break the spell. Nothing worked. Days passed, but not a heartbeat quickened, no breath came a millisecond faster.

All over the world, fathers looked upon the rows of their comatose offspring and went looking for drink. Distracted mothers alternated between caring for their waking youngest and futilely trying to awaken the rest.

Only those homes with a single child were unaffected. But in many such, another child was on the way. And it was soon found that whenever the mother gave birth, as the newborn cry squalled out, the eyelids of the older baby fell upon its cheeks. By the time the new baby had started to nurse, the former only-child was cooling into hibernation. It seemed that in every home only one child, the youngest, could wake to cry and feed and play in normalcy. All around it, in every hut, hospital, sampan or split-level,

the older siblings lay in cold trance.

Desperation mounted with the days; all other issues faded to insignificance. Was the earth and the hearts of its people to be filled with the living dead?

And then the first sleeper woke.

It was, at any rate, the first one known, and it happened on Day Fourteen in the well-filled trailer of the McEvoys in Pawnet, West Virginia. As the sun rose, a young voice that had been silent for a fortnight spoke.

"Maw! Maw, I'm hongry."

Mrs. McEvoy rushed into the front room where her sleeping brood was laid out on every surface. Denny, her next-to-youngest, was starting to scream in fright because he had touched his cold brother Earl. She clutched him and felt of him while he wriggled; he seemed perfectly all right.

"Earlene!" called her sister. "I can't wake the baby. I think she's coolin' off."

And sure enough, little Debbie McEvoy was sliding into the chill of hibernation and could not be roused.

The waking of a child was world news; the media led a mass descent upon little Dennis. It was soon established that he was his normal self with no memory of his missing fortnight.

Among the crowd was a lanky, quizzical man named Springer. Like Jolyone, he believed in numbers. He ascertained that there were eighteen living McEvoy children, and his face became more puzzled than ever.

"You, ah, don't happen to have any more children, do you, Mrs. McEvoy?"

Earlene McEvoy's face clamped shut.

But her neighbors were not so reticent, and Springer soon discovered that there had been a period, or periods, of extra-McEvoy activity in Earlene's life. The results thereof were now living, or rather, sleeping, with various distant relatives. He was also impressed by the robust health Mrs. McEvoy had imparted to all her young.

"Twenty-six," he mused. Twenty-six alive from one mother. Remarkable. And there's twenty-six fortnights in a year, give or take a few hours."

To Mrs. McEvoy he said only, "I'd keep my eye on Dennis about a week from Saturday."

"Why?"

"It's only a hunch, Mrs. McEvoy. He just might go back to sleep then."

"Don't talk like that, mister."

But, sure enough, on Saturday week young Dennis was cooling back to hibernation while his next-oldest sister woke up.

By then it wasn't a surprise, because living families of less than

twenty-six are more common and enough other children were waking up to make the arithmetic plain. Saturday week was Day Twenty-eight; on that morning, the next-youngest child of every family of thirteen was waking up while the youngest slid into stasis.

It was clear what had happened, at least in its first incredible outlines.

No one had been killed.

No one had been hurt, except by overzealous efforts to wake them.

No one had been prevented from having as many children as her heart, mores, ignorance or vulnerability dictated. (It was noted with varying emotions that the Affliction seemed to count only mothers as parents.)

What had happened was time-sharing.

Every child, it appeared, would have its turn at being awake, and this was shortly found to be true. The problem was that the length of time it stayed awake depended on how many siblings it had. All the children of each mother shared out the year, each getting more or less depending on their number; the twenty-six offspring of Earlene got only a fortnight apiece while each child of a pair waked for six months. Only-children were unaffected. Thus each mother had always one waking child — and one only.

But were the children of large families to be robbed of most of their lives? Was even the child of a two-child family to lose half its life asleep?

The answer slowly came back: No.

It required time to be sure, of course. But right from the start people had their suspicions, because even the smallest hibernating infants did not seem to grow. Hair and nails did not lengthen, even small cuts did not heal. Older children awoke with their last meals undigested and their last waking preoccupations on their lips. In sleeping women, pregnancies did not advance. Scientists watched, measured, argued, and finally the startling fact was understood: Those who hibernated did not perceptibly age. Only waking hours counted as life.

This meant — this meant — with a world-wide gasp it was realized that the sleepers' lives would be long. Even the children of a pair would take twice as long as normal to grow up and then, presumably, would go on to live twice the usual span. And as for those from larger families —

For two days the McEvoys were in the news again when it was realized that Earlene's brood might live, if all survived, for fifteen hundred years — each doing so two weeks at a time. Then a woman in

Afghanistan was delivered of her thirtieth living child. People drew in their breaths, contemplating a baby who could live, in twelve-day installments, for three thousand years.

The world was upside down.

It's hard to remember how it went, the chaos in all our heads as the tired old problems were overwhelmed by new ones. Different problems everywhere, of course. In the hungry nations millions of young mouths closed peacefully, while a million tasks went undone because the child workers were sleeping. A dozen nasty little wars subsided across their hibernating armies. In the industrialized world the loss of millions of young consumers ushered in the great Sleepers' Depression that's with us still. The reality of zero pop growth came crunching down on us all.

And beyond the economic immediacies rose the great human questions. Who will care for the sleeping multitudes when their parents age and die? How do you educate kids in monthly or six-monthly increments? What will we do with teen-agers who are going to be teen-agers for centuries ahead? Sibling rivalry has taken on new and fearful dimensions as children realize that they sleep because their brothers and sisters wake; mercifully many can understand that their hibernation also means long life. Everything has subtly changed in a myriad ways. Even fiction and soap-operas have taken on a whole new content: Can a girl who wakes only in summer find happiness with a boy who wakes through summers and autumns too?

All over the world, groups of the young people who waken at the same time are forming, to be replaced when the next group wakes. Perhaps alternative cultures will develop on the same terrain. Or perhaps the visible futility of having additional children will do what no other arguments could. The number of people who believe that this is temporary gets less every year. It seems the "angel" has wrought well, having the superior technology you'd expect of angels.

Meanwhile a strange sense of quiet pervades our life. The decibels seem to have fallen and the grass could be coming back. In every family, only one child at a time coos or squalls or begs for the car keys or mugs old ladies or competes for jobs or medical school. Only one young body in each home consumes food or firewood or gasoline or orthodontistry or plastic toys. And each child as it wakes gets the full attention of its adults.

A peaceful trip, while it lasts. Happy Harry Joel's thousand new homes went into receivership half-built, though of course nothing could be done about the kit-foxes.

As for Jolyone Schram, who had started it all, she has had several good job offers, being an awake-all-the-time only child. She spends a lot of time just breathing and listening to the growing green. The terrible vision faded away. But she never told anybody what happened. Except one night in Point Lobos Park; when she saw I was harmless, she told me.

We were sitting by a dusty eucalyptus clump, looking out to where the rocks drown in the shimmering moonlit Pacific.

"The thing is," she said, frowning, "I was thinking. Take sixteen people, say. That's eight couples."

I saw she still believed in numbers.

"So they have children. But only one apiece is awake at a time. So that's like it's really just one child. And then say the eight children marry, that's four couples. And they have one waking child each, that's four. And they grow up and marry, that's two couples. So it comes down to really two children. I mean, it's half each time ... of course that takes a long time."

"A long time," I agreed.

"But when the two children grow up and marry, they have one child. I mean, it *counts* as one child. And that's all."

"Looks that way."

She pushed back her hair, frowning harder in the moonlight. "Of course there's billions of people, not just sixteen, so it's a *really* long way off. And maybe something's wrong with my idea, I mean, they'll all wake up eventually. But ... I wonder if the, the person I spoke to, I wonder if they thought of that?"

"No telling, is there?"

The sea sighed and glittered peacefully, making long shining curves around the rocks. There was no sign of any oil. There wasn't much litter on the grass, and the highway behind us was unusually empty.

Jolyone sat staring out with her chin on her knees. "Maybe whoever it was will come back and change things in time. Or maybe I should tell people and try to call it somehow."

"Would you know how?"

"No."

"There's a lot of time for somebody else to worry about all that," I offered.

We sat in silence for a while. Then she sighed and stretched out on the grass; a strange, private, gentle girl.

"Funny ... I feel like I'd almost got run over. It feels good to, to *be*. Maybe the thing is, I should just go on and enjoy it."

"Why not?"

And that's exactly what she went on and did.

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